

N. OGNEV



KOSTYA RYABTSEV'S DIARY





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Translated from the Russian by *Fainna Glagoleva*

Illustrated by *Yuri Fomenko*

Н. ОГНЕВ

ДНЕВНИК КОСТИ РЯБЦЕВА

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To *Yefim Zozulia*



SCENES OF SCHOOL LIFE

September 1923 — June 1924



THE FIRST TRIMESTER

THE FIRST NOTEBOOK

September-October

SEPTEMBER 15

September is half gone, but school hasn't started yet. I don't know when classes will begin. They said the building was being renovated, but when I went there this morning I didn't see any repairs being done. There wasn't a soul inside, so I couldn't even find out a thing. All the doors were open, and the building was empty. I traded this notebook for three lemons.

When I got home I didn't have anything to do, so I decided to start a diary. I'll enter everything that happens here.

I wish I could change my name from Konstantin to Vladlen, because an awful lot of fellows are named Kostya. Besides, Konstantin was a Turkish king who conquered Constantinople and, as Seryozha Blinov would say, I couldn't care less. I went over to the militia station yesterday to find out about changing my name and was told I'll have to wait till I'm eighteen and of age. That means I still have two and a half years to go. What a shame.

SEPTEMBER 16

I thought I'd have to invent things to write in my diary, because I never dreamed there'd be so much to write about. I went to see Seryozha Blinov this morning, and he told me school would start on the 20th. Our conversation about Lina G. was very important. He told me not to hang around with her, because her father's a priest, and since I'm the son of a working-class family, it's shameful to do things that would attract every-

one's attention. I told him that, in the first place, I wasn't attracting anyone's attention, and that Lina was in my class and that we shared a double desk, and that's why it's only natural for us to pal around. But he said a person's proletarian class consciousness couldn't stand for such a thing. Besides, according to the skworks¹ and all the former members of the pupils' committee, I was having (so they said) a bad influence on her. They said that she was spending all her time hanging around with me instead of studying and, in general, might begin going to pot ideologically. Seryozha also said that I should stop palling around with girls in general if I wanted to join the Komsomol. I told him to shut up and then came back home, and here I am now, writing what I didn't have a chance to finish telling him. I don't regard Lina as a woman, but only as a friend, and anyway, I feel a sort of contempt for all the girls in my class in general. All they're interested in are clothes and bangles, and dancing, and gossiping most of all. If people were ever jailed for gossiping, there wouldn't be a single girl left in my class. As for Lina and me going to the movies together last year, it was only because I had nobody else to go with, and she likes to go to the movies as much as I do. There's nothing wrong about that.

I can't wait for school to start. School is just as important to me as my own home. And even more interesting.

I just read over everything I wrote and decided to write something every day if possible. Besides, I'll copy out poems and stories I like and good articles from wall newspapers.

SEPTEMBER 20

School finally started. The commotion was deafening. All the same kids are in my class this year, and there are two new girls. One is a blonde. She has a long braid tied with a bow that looks like a propeller. Her name's Sylphida, though she's Russian and no foreigner. The girls started calling her Sylva right off. Her last name's Dubinina. The other is a brunette. She has a short bob and always wears black. She looks glum and never smiles. If you say something to her all you get in reply is humph, humph! You'd think she was a steam engine, puffing like that. She looks hunched up, and slithers along like a shadow. Her name is Zoya Travnikova.

¹ Skworks — school workers (teachers). — Tr.

SEPTEMBER 27

We're going to study according to the Dalton Plan. It's a new system according to which the skworks don't do anything, and the pupils have to learn everything by themselves. At least, that's the way I understand it. There won't be any more regular classes. Instead, we'll be given assignments. The assignments have to be handed in in a month's time. They can be done in school or at home, and as soon as you have it done, you go to the lab to hand it in. We're going to have labs instead of classrooms. There'll be a skwork in each lab, in charge of his or her special subject. For instance, Almakfish will hang out in the math lab, Nikpetozh in the social studies lab, etc. They'll be like spiders, and we'll be the flies.

Starting from now on we decided to abbreviate the skworks for the sake of convenience. Alexei Maximovich Fischer will be Almakfish. Nikolai Petrovich Ozhigov will be Nikpetozh.

Lina and I aren't on speaking terms. She wants to change seats and move away.

OCTOBER 1

The Dalton Plan is under way. They removed all the desks, leaving them in one room only, and that's going to be the auditorium. Then long tables and benches were moved in instead of our desks. Vanya Petukhov and I wandered about from one lab to another all day long feeling very stupid. So far the skworks haven't got any idea about what the Dalton Plan is all about, either. Nikpetozh, as usual, turned out to be smarter than anyone else. He came in and conducted a class like he always used to, the only difference being that we were seated on benches instead of at our desks. Sylphida Dubinina sat next to me, and Lina sat a mile away. To hell with her. I couldn't care less.

Zoya Travnikova made everybody laugh today. She told the girls that the dead get up at night and come to visit the living. Some of the boys went over to listen to what she was saying. Vanya Petukhov asked her whether she'd ever seen any dead people getting up from the grave, and she said she had. Then Vanya asked her what they looked like, and she said they were blueish and pale, and looked like they hadn't eaten in a long time. And they howled. She made a terrible face. Then Vanya said, "That's a pack of lies. I think dead people

have stripes and polka-dots and grunt like this: Oink-oink!" And he began grunting like a pig. Zoya got all huffy and began saying humph-humph and everybody laughed.

OCTOBER 3

The Dalton Plan isn't much of a success. Nobody understands it, neither the skworks nor us. The skworks discuss it every evening. The only thing that's different is the benches instead of desks, which means we have no place for our books. Nikpetozh says it doesn't make any difference, because all the books on a given subject will be in a special bookcase in each lab, and the pupils will take whatever books they need. But what do we do until we get the bookcases?

The boys said there's a rich lord named Dalton, and that he's the guy who invented the plan. What I'd like to know is why the hell we need that rich man's plan? They also said that while the lord was busy inventing his plan, his cook fed him liver paste and truffles. I'd like to see how he'd make out if all he had was a ration of 1/8 lb. of pumpernickel bread a day and salted fish. Or else make him go begging in the countryside like we did when we were in the children's colony. Anybody can invent a plan if they're fed liver paste and truffles.

Sylphida keeps fidgeting all the time, and it's annoying. I told her to go to hell a couple of times, and she called me a louse. I asked the girls what sort of a family she comes from, and they said her father's a type-setter. Too bad she's not from a rich family or I would have put her in her place.

OCTOBER 4

There was a general meeting today. The subject on the agenda was self-government. We discussed the shortcomings there were last year and ways of overcoming them. The chief shortcoming is the demerit ledger. All the members of the pupils' committee, even the best ones, always threaten you with the demerit ledger at the drop of a hat. Still and all, it doesn't help. We finally decided to do away with the ledger for a month and see what would happen. Everybody was happy and cheered.

Zoya Travnikova sure is a killjoy. She got up and said in a spooky voice, "I think anybody who's bad should be put in a dark storeroom, especially the boys. That's the only way to manage them." Everybody started stamping and whistling. Everybody was indignant, and then she apologized and said she was only joking. That sure is some way of joking! She always dresses in black, so the kids call her Black Zoya.

The new pupils' committee met after the general meeting. The committee's been elected for a month.

OCTOBER 5

My group was pretty mad today. This is what happened. We have a new skwork. She'll be teaching biology. Her name's Yelena Nikitichna Kaurova, meaning Yelnikitka. She was about to tell us our assignment and said, "Children!" Then I got up and said, "We're not children." Then she said, "Of course you are, and that's how I intend to address you." Then I said, "Try to be a little more polite if you don't want to get sent to hell!" And that was that. All the kids were on my side. Yelnikitka got red in the face and said, "I must ask you to leave the classroom." So I said, "In the first place, this is not a classroom, it's a lab, and nobody is ever sent out of the room any more." Then she said, "You're very rude." And I said, "You're just like a teacher in the old schools. That's the way they used to act." And that was that. All the kids were on my side. Yelnikitka rushed out like a house on fire. What a mess. The pupils' committee will be after me and the teachers' council, and then the school council. Actually, it's all a lot of fuss about nothing, and Yelnikitka is just a damn fool.

In the old schools before the Revolution the skworks used to lord it over the pupils, but now we won't let such a thing happen. Nikpetozh read us a piece from *Seminary Notes*. In those days even big fellows were whipped in class, and I myself read quite a few books about how pupils were made to cram and were given all kinds of stupid nicknames. But kids in those days couldn't even dream of the times we've lived through. After all, we've lived through hunger and ruin and we've had to support our families, and travel thousands of miles into the countryside for grain, and some kids even fought in the Civil War. It only ended a little over two years ago. I started thinking about all this after my argument with Yelnikitka and wanted

to talk it all over with Nikpetozh to get a clear view of it, but he was busy. He had a lab full of pupils. So I went to the math lab and told Almakfish just what I thought about our life. He gave me a very fuzzy answer. He said that everything we've been through was *a sign of the abundance of the epoch from a quantitative point of view, while from a qualitative point of view it stood apart from good and evil.*

That's not what I meant at all. I only wanted to show him that no one has a right to treat us like children or pawns, but we didn't finish our talk, because some kids came in to discuss math. I don't know why Almakfish decided to talk about good and evil. As far as I'm concerned, there is no such thing as good and evil, or, rather, something that somebody considers to be evil can be very good for someone else, and the other way around. If a storekeeper makes a profit of 100 per cent it's a good thing for him, but as far as the buyers are concerned it's evil. At least, that's what the social studies book says.

OCTOBER 6

They sure piled on the assignments. In a month's time and even less, meaning by November 1, we have to read a stack of books, write 10 reports, do 8 diagrams and be prepared to report orally, that is, not report but hold a discussion on the work accomplished. Every pupil has a different assignment. Besides, there's lab work to be done in physics, chemistry and biology. That means spending a whole week in the physics' lab.

Sylphida and I were called in to the pupils' committee today. Seryozha Blinov and some other kids are on the committee. That's when I found out she had gone running to complain that I called her names and was rude. That's a lie. When we left the room I yanked her bow. She burst into tears and ran off. Sitting next to girls is just intellectual namby-pamby. I'll change seats tomorrow.

OCTOBER 7

The teachers' council decided to discuss the Yelnikitka business at the school council meeting and suggested that the general meeting discuss the case, too. The general meeting's

tomorrow. I don't know what the outcome will be, but I do know that we won't let anyone call us children.

The first issue of the new wall newspaper, "The Red Pupil", came out today. At first everyone crowded around, but then we saw it was a lot of baloney. The articles are very dull. They're all about studying well and behaving well. Seryozha Blinov and some other kids are on the editorial board.

Someone wrote me a note. It says: "Don't waste your time putting on airs. None of the girls want to have anything to do with you."

I wonder how a person's supposed to put on airs?

Lina must have written it. She and the new girl, Black Zoya, are friends now. They spend all their free time sitting by the brick oven and whispering, even when everyone's outside playing. They're probably dying to have someone come over and pester them, but none of the boys pays any attention to them. What the hell for? Black Zoya has a new nickname. It's Fascist, because the fascists always wear black, too. She doesn't know what it means, but it makes her mad anyway. Actually, the girls in my class don't know as much about politics as the boys do.

OCTOBER 8

I just got home from school. The general meeting at which Yelnikitka's and my case was discussed just ended. Nikpetozh's speech was the most intelligent of all. He said that this wasn't really important and that every teacher should have an approach to the pupils, and that Yelena Nikitichna hasn't developed an approach yet but will in time. The skworks said that I was a rude boy and that pressure should be brought to bear upon me to make me change. Our principal, Big Zina, said I was an intelligent boy but didn't know how to control my emotions. I really don't know how to control them, but I hate anyone to call me a boy! It's hard to argue with Big Zina, because if she gets mad she can summon you to the teachers' room and give you such a dressing-down it'll make you sick for the rest of the day. To continue on the subject of the general meeting. All of a sudden Black Zoya got up and said that I had gotten completely out of hand, that I was annoying the girls and etc. This was the limit. In the first place, I've never even spoken to her, and in the second place, she hasn't got a bit of proof. All the kids in my group hissed, because it's

against the rules to tattle about anyone in your class at a general meeting. When my case was put to a vote it was decided that I had to apologize to Yelnikitka, and I said I would after she apologized first for having called us children. The case is going to the school council now. I guess Yelnikitka won't give me anything but poor marks in biology, and that'll be about all.

I walked home with Vanya Petukhov and he said I shouldn't give in, because it's even worse to give in. Vanya sells cigarettes, but he doesn't have a license. The militia man kept chasing him off the corner, but Vanya didn't give in and the militia man finally got fed up. Now Vanya can sell cigarettes all he wants to. He has to, because he has a sick aunt and a sister to support, and he's the only breadwinner, and he has to go to school, too. It's a good thing my Dad's a tailor and I'm all he has, or I'd have to sell cigarettes, too.

OCTOBER 10

Yelnikitka was explaining an assignment in the auditorium today. Sylva was sitting at my desk and kept fidgeting, and I jabbed my elbow into her by accident. She screeched. Yelnikitka wanted to know what the matter was and, naturally, Sylva tattled. Yelnikitka said I was a hooligan. I asked her what a hooligan was and what the word meant, but she couldn't give me a sensible answer. Then I asked Nikpetozh what a hooligan was and he said it was a person who caused harm to others while doing himself no good either. What harm did I do Sylva? I didn't spit in her plate, did I?

OCTOBER 11

A new wall paper entitled "X" appeared out of the blue today. It poked fun at everyone: the skworks, Dalton, the girls who go dancing instead of studying, and, most important, at "The Red Pupil". There was a poem about Dalton which I even copied out.

A DREAM

*Listen to my story, people:
Once a pharaoh had a dream.
The dark sea was cleaved, and deeply,
And he saw what'd never been seen.*

*Standing there were seven beaming,
Huge and joyous, fatted cows,
They were red and black, and gleaming,
Some were lilac, some were brown.
But the pharaoh was not given
To enjoy his cows for long.
Thunder crashed and rain was driven
Down upon the herd. A gong
Rent the air. The deep was severed,
Bringing up for all to see
Seven more, exactly seven,
Cows to roam the pharaoh's lea.
They, however, all were skinny,
And were draped with seaweed green.
They'd been banished by the sea king,
For he hated meat so lean.
But these seven raised their tails and,
Overcoming their frail state,
Charged ahead like maddened brigands,
Full of venom, rage and hate.
They attacked the poor, mild bovines,
Chewing cud and growing fat,
And the lean ones ate the fat ones
Leaving not a single scrap.
"Cast away your superstitions,
Such a dream is not that bad,"
Joseph told the pharaoh. "Listen,
It is lovely. Don't be sad."
Who will calm my fears and worries?
Who will tell me what it means?
Never did a pharaoh know this,
Never had he such a dream.
Thus I dreamed: it was amazing,
For my school had changed apace —
It had just gone through revising,
Every boy hoped to be praised.
All the kids were fat and gleaming,
All cavorted in the grass,
And their addled brains were sleeping,
Dozing peacefully at last.
Then there came a crash of thunder.
(Sweat poured off me in my dream).
Standing in the schoolyard yonder
Was Lord Dalton, looking mean.*

*There in tow he had a hundred
Vacant, empty, awful labs.
I was sick when first I wandered
Into one. It was so drab.
That's when all the hundred quickly
Pounced upon the boys at once,
Howling loudly, growling thickly,
Gobbling them up, one by one.
I will tell you that this didn't
Help those bleak old labs. In fact,
Nothing added any spirit
Nothing added any fat.
They remained as bare as ever,
Then a brazen shade was seen.
It belonged to Dalton, that cur!
Cruel and spiteful had he been.
I tried hard to cast my dream off,
And I yelled. It was a plea:
Where, oh where, is that man Joseph,
To explain my dream to me?*

That's because the labs are still empty. Actually, all the books on social science have been moved from the school library to the social studies lab and the fish bowl and the various collections have been moved into the biology lab, but that's all. The real way to do it would be to stock every lab with all the books and all the visual aids it needed. Then you could find whatever you wanted and do your assignments the right way.

OCTOBER 12

We were playing "bast shoe" in the gym during the lunch recess today. It's a winter game we invented and it's like soccer. There's an old bast shoe under the stairs which we get out whenever we want to play. We stand around in a circle and kick the shoe as hard as we can. The object of the game is to kick it out of the circle. Whoever's "it" stands in the middle and tries to catch it. If he does, he changes places with the fellow who kicked it last. We were playing, making the shoe fly like an airplane. Then I kicked it and it flew out of the circle and hit Big Zina right in the face just as she came in. She was fit to be tied. She stamped her foot (that's a habit

she has) and shouted, "Stop that this minute! Who kicked it?" Nobody said a word. Then she went on to make a sorry speech, "I thought the rule still holds in our school and the guilty one would come forth and confess, and if he doesn't it means he's a coward and the like."

At this I interrupted her to say, "Sure, the guilty person should confess, but what has he done wrong to confess about?"

"He's guilty of being too boisterous and not considering the possibility of an accident."

Then I said it was me.

Big Zina came over, grabbed me by the hand and said, "Come along."

I seemed to be in a daze, because I followed her to the teachers' room. She went at me hammer and tongs. I hate that.

So I said, "What's the use of self-government if skworks can meddle in everything and reprimand a person all the time? Why don't you speak to the pupils' committee? They'll help me to improve."

"You must understand, and this is most important, that you are not a person yet, but still just a bud. You are not responsible for your actions." And she continued her harangue.

When she was finally done with me the game was over and so was our lunch break. If Seryozha Blinov and I were still friends, I'd have gone over to him to talk about self-government and the skworks. Now there's nobody to talk to, not counting Vanya Petukhov.

I've been wanting to join the Komsomol, but our group never does anything. It could certainly have called the skworks to order, but it never interferes in school affairs. The meetings are open to all comers, but they're so boring that nobody except the members attends. All they ever talk about there is politics and studies. It's just like a dull lesson. And if any of the kids decide to make a report, it'll put you to sleep in no time.

OCTOBER 13

The school council met today and discussed my case. Then Big Zina butted in and told them about the bast shoe. A resolution was passed and now influence is supposed to be used to make me improve. Nikpetozh led me off to one of the empty

labs for a talk. He didn't say a word about my character, but kept speaking about Dalton. He said that teachers have a different view of teaching in our day. In olden times, the idea was to cram a pupil's head with all sorts of information as quickly as possible, and then, after he graduated, it would all evaporate in a flash. In other words, an empty vessel had to be filled. The idea that it could be spilled as well didn't bother them at all. Nowadays a pupil is regarded as a bonfire which has only to be lighted, and from then on it'll burn by itself. That's why the Dalton Plan was introduced: to make the pupils use their heads as much as possible.

I said that was very difficult and that hardly anyone would pass the tests by November 1. But Nikpetozh said that that wasn't of such importance, and that everyone would eventually understand how useful the Dalton Plan was. I don't so far. Then I asked him whether he thought I was a hooligan or not.

He said that he didn't really think so, but that I was very abrupt. He said that I'd overcome this in time. I was in the best of spirits when I left the lab and was actually singing as I went off to find Yelnikitka and apologize.

Just as I reached the biology lab, Yelnikitka dashed out and began scolding me, saying I wasn't studying and was interfering with others as well, etc. I got mad, stuck out my tongue at her and stamped off. Now she'll drag this to the school council, too. And they'll summon Dad. To hell with them!

As far as I can see, Yelnikitka isn't doing a thing to start my bonfire, but she's putting it out pretty good.

I got another note today:

"Even though a certain person has a crush on you, don't think you're that good-looking. And stop cursing, because nobody wants to talk to you when you do."

I think Lina wrote it again.

OCTOBER 15

Yesterday was Sunday and Sylva and I went to the movies. Why did I go with her? Because I found out that she can get free passes. We saw *Shipwreck Island*. I noticed Lina and Black Zoya in the lobby. They're the best of friends now and are forever whispering.

After the picture Lina came over to me and said, "Come here for a minute."

I followed her, and Sylva turned around and went home. Then Lina said, "Even though we're not on speaking terms, I have to tell you that you may not see me any more soon. And you can tell your precious Sylva that I despise her!" I turned and walked past Black Zoya. She was standing there like a zombie.

Why do they keep pestering me?

OCTOBER 20

I don't have any time to write, because we keep going on excursions. We've been to a factory and to a museum.

OCTOBER 22

New issues of the "X" wall newspaper keep appearing, but nobody can discover who's putting it out. I think it's the senior class. Now there's a sheet that's been passed around in secret, so the skworks won't find out. It's called the "XS", and it stands for "X Supplement".

It's full of filthy jokes and such, and funny as hell.

OCTOBER 23

A copy of the "XS" got into Nikpetozh's hands. Nikpetozh then gave us a long, sticky lecture on love and the relationship between men and women, as if we'd never heard of it before. I was particularly amazed by what he said about love being a flowering garden and anyone who made out that it was filthy was defiling that garden. Volodya Shmerts even asked him to repeat it. "You mean it's really a flowering garden?" And Nikpetozh said it really was a magnificent garden, all bright and shiny, and golden, and silver. The boys snickered. The girls hissed at them, and Black Zoya got up and said, "There's also love to the grave." Nikpetozh said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "Not only to the grave, but beyond the grave. I know a man who loved a dead girl." Her face became so awful she began to look like a corpse herself. The boys stopped laughing. Nikpetozh said that that was abnormal and that a dead body disintegrated so fast and was turned to dust so fast that there could be no question of anyone loving a dead person.

OCTOBER 24

The October tests are just around the corner, but I haven't even started studying yet. Damn that Dalton. My head feels like it's full of sawdust. I never dreamed it was so hard to study by yourself.

OCTOBER 25

We have a new wall newspaper. It's put out by the primary grades and it's called "The Reel". Everybody wanted to see it, because it featured an interesting question: "Can a girl and a boy be friends in our school?" I've copied out the answers that were tacked up beside the newspaper:

1. If they're compatible.
2. A girl can't be friends with a boy, because boys and girls have different outlooks and interests. (Black Zoya wrote this.)
3. I think a girl can, but not with every boy. Such things have happened in school, but as soon as two people become friends everybody else begins to tease them and breaks up the friendship. They see it all in a different light.
4. No. Girls are the spirit of contradiction (I wrote this.)
5. Yes, if some of the girls didn't treat boys like dirt, which undermines the attitude of the other girls to the latter.
6. It's rather difficult to answer this question. I, for one, understand friendship in two different ways. In the first place, girls and boys should have a common collective friendship and I believe this is possible. But there's a second kind of friendship which is the friendship of individuals who are somehow drawn to each other and become friends. This friendship may exist between a boy and a girl, but, naturally, not between every boy and every girl and vice versa. In a word, friendship is something fine and exalted which we must not view negatively.
7. I don't think they can at present, because any kind of friendship will eventually develop into stronger emotions on one or the other side. (I saw Lina writing this.)

OCTOBER 26

Something serious happened today.

Zoya Travnikova was first nicknamed "Black Zoya" and then "Fascist", and nobody paid any attention to it, not counting

her. But Nikpetozh told us about Mussolini and the fascists today in detail. He told us about the black-shirted troopers seizing Rome and then murdering the Communists.

During our lunch recess the boys surrounded Zoya and began to sing,

Fear not the fascists, to arms, to arms!

At first Zoya began to bawl. Then she started to fight and we laughed. Then, all of a sudden, she collapsed. We stopped singing and bent over her. She looked like she was dead. Her face was white and her teeth were clenched. We got scared and ran for water to splash on her face. But she didn't come to. Then Yelnikitka came running. She was on duty today. She scolded us and told us to get the smelling salts from the first-aid cabinet. We did. Yelnikitka held the salts under Zoya's nose and she seemed to come to a little. Then Yelnikitka began scolding us again and chased us away.

After that Nikpetozh, who's our home teacher, herded us into the auditorium and had a talk on nicknames. At first, he wanted to know what nicknames we had. The girls all have several, but hardly any of the boys do. One of the girls has four: Mutt, Beanpole, Hag and Cabbage. We argued over it for a long time and then decided that if anyone didn't want to be called a certain name he had only to say so and nobody would any more. All the girls began shouting at once, saying that they didn't want to have any nicknames. It was all written down in the minutes.

As far as I'm concerned, I think it's a lot of intellectual hash. My nickname's Goat and I don't mind it a bit.

OCTOBER 27

We now have a Young Pioneer detachment. You have to take a pledge and then march around in the gym and stop smoking, etc. All the show-offs signed up. As far as I'm concerned, wearing red ties is for babies. I'd rather wait till the Komso-mol accepts me. As for my political convictions, I'm a Communist.

Zoya and Lina didn't join the Young Pioneers, because they say the Young Pioneers don't believe in God. That's what they tell each other and what they say to the other girls. They're

both stupid fools, because the world evolved from a cell, and this can be proved, and no god created it. When Yelnikitka gives us our assignment for November I'll ask her about God. Since biology is her field, she should be able to explain it all in detail.

OCTOBER 29

Here's what Seryozha Blinov and I talked about.

He said, "Even though I'm a member of the pupils' committee, I don't think our self-government is worth a damn. It's no self-government if we have to do whatever the skworks tell us to. There's a lot that's been handed down to us from the old schools. For instance, the idea of greeting the skworks. Every pupil who sees a skwork for the first time during the day has to greet him or her. I don't think that's right. What if a pupil doesn't feel like saying good morning? Or take the rule about rising to greet a skwork entering the classroom. Actually, that's not so important now, because we don't have classrooms any more and we hardly ever go to assembly."

I agreed. Then Seryozha asked me whether I'd back him up if he spoke out against such a form of self-government. I said I would. It's true. There really is no self-government. If the pupils' committee passes a resolution it has to go to the teachers' council first and from there to the school council, and it won't be valid until the school council approves it. Then again, any skwork can nag the life out of a kid. I should know!

OCTOBER 30

Black Zoya fainted away—today. She was sitting by the stove with Lina as usual. Maybe they quarreled or something. It all ended with Zoya collapsing again. They sprinkled cold water on her again and gave her smelling salts and finally brought around. Big Zina took her to the teachers' room and had a long talk with her. Zoya's a funny girl. It seems to me she keeps thinking about corpses too much, and that's why she keeps fainting.

OCTOBER 31

Our tests start tomorrow. I sat up all night yesterday and will have to today again. The worst of it is that I don't have any books. The other kids took whatever there was from the labs and the library, because they're studying, too. I don't know where to get any. I don't have the money to buy them. I'll do my social studies charts today.

I don't think our school should have ever adopted the Dalton Plan.

Everything is nearly ready. We have a red star that lights up over the entrance. There are fir branches and flags in all the labs, the gym and the auditorium. Everyone says it looks very nice and that makes me feel good.

Everyone has gone to the demonstration, even Dad, but I'm at home, lying in bed. I can't even walk. Yesterday I climbed up on the roof over the entrance to hang up a poster. It read: "Long Live the Soviets!" And I tumbled down and pulled a ligament. It was awfully painful, but it's better now, though I can't even stand up. Sylva was there. She took my shoe off right there on the street and began rubbing my foot. I wouldn't let her at first, but then I gave in. It even felt good. Then she called Vanya Petukhov and some other kids and dug up a stretcher someplace and they carried me home. I never knew a girl could be a good friend! Or am I wrong? I have to remember to talk this over with Vanya Petukhov. Since I don't have anything else to do, I'll write something about everyone.

Vanya Petukhov is as sly as a fox. Everyone went to take the math test on November 1. Actually, we can take our tests whenever we want to. Anyway, Vanya didn't go. After the test he found out which theorems are Almakfish's favorites and went to take the test on the 3rd. And he passed. He did the same in every other subject. Now Vanya has no debts. I can't do that. I don't think you'll ever have a bonfire that way. You have to study everything yourself and really hard if you want anything to remain in your head. Then again, everybody crowds outside the labs, whispering, "What did he ask you about? What did she ask you?" Just like it used to be during examinations in the old school.

Now I'll list which skwork hates whom.

Yelnikitka hates me, and Almakfish hates Sylva. He flunked her in math and in physics. And she burst into tears. But he's very spiteful. Sylva told me he kept picking on her bow, saying, "You know how to wear a bow, but you don't know your math." I don't think he has a right to talk to her like that. The teachers in the old schools had a right to talk to their pupils like that.

Big Zina can't stand Vanya Petukhov. She's called "Big Zina" because she's so tall. When you see her coming down the hall

THE SECOND NOTEBOOK.

November

NOVEMBER 1

Naturally, I flunked my math and physics and didn't even try to take the biology test. There's a name for this and it's going to be called "debts". That means that whenever I do pass, it'll be good enough, but until I do there won't be a tick next to my name. I don't feel too good about it, because more than half of my classmates passed. Naturally, Nikpetozh passed me. And I handed in all the charts.

We're beginning to prepare for the October Revolution anniversary celebration. I've been elected to the committee. Sylphida D. was also elected.

NOVEMBER 3

We decided to deck the school out with green branches and red flags. The skworks said they wouldn't interfere so that we could be completely in charge. This is just fine. It's much better without them. I've discovered that Sylva isn't as stupid or intellectual as I thought she was. She doesn't like to dance, and she wears that stupid bow because her mother makes her. I told her not to pay any attention to what her mother says, but she said she loves her and that's why she obeys her. I can't really understand that. I mean, wearing a bow when you don't want to. I'd never wear a bow even though I love Dad and respect him.

We're going to the woods for fir trees tomorrow. Hooray!

she looks like the fire-tower on Sukharev Market Square. We even made up a game about it, with her as the fire-tower and us as the vendors. As soon as she appears in the gym we start shouting,

"Hot pies! Hot pies!"

"Silks and cottons for your bottoms!"

"Old pants for hired hands!"

She crosses the gym with her mouth hanging open from joy, because she doesn't know what it's all about. She has a huge mouth and a big yellow tooth sticking out of it. And you can see she's thinking, "How nice to see the children playing. If the district inspector came along now he'd certainly be pleased." And she has no idea that she's the butt of the joke. The kids are afraid of her. When she wants to tell us anything, she stamps her foot and shouts, "Attention!"

And everyone shuts up. Actually, though, we're not soldiers to be ordered around like that.

She doesn't like Vanya Petukhov because he sells cigarettes. As far as she's concerned, he might as well be a waif, and she thinks he drinks homebrew and plays cards, and sniffs cocaine and sleeps around with women. She actually said, "You might corrupt the whole school."

Vanya really does smoke, because I do, too, and so does Seryozha Blinov whom Big Zina always sets up as a shining example to everybody else. As far as all her other suspicions go, they're a pack of lies. The waifs really do know Vanya, because he reads to them, since they're illiterate. I've been wanting to go along with him and have a look. They live in the deserted cellar of a house that doesn't exist any more. Even the cellar is partly caved in, and that's where they live.

Vanya's not afraid of them. He says there are a lot of good fellows among them and it would be nice to have them at school if they weren't illiterate. They made things pretty hard for him in the beginning. They'd knock him over, steal the cigarettes out of his tray and try to give him a black eye to boot. That's when he decided to go over and get acquainted. He took some books and some cigarettes to treat them, and started reading out loud to them. They're just like babies. They like fairy-tales. Ever since then they've left him alone. Big Zina doesn't know a thing about this and keeps yapping at him. To tell the truth, Vanya and I did try sniffing cocaine once, but the only thing that happened was that our heads began to ache and then we started vomiting. What a mess! But to hear Vanya tell it, the waifs can't live without cocaine.

Nikpetozh never nags anyone, and that's why everybody in my class trusts him. He says he's proud of us, because we have a sense of collective conscience. I don't really agree with him, because even though that may be true as far as the boys are concerned, you can't say so about the girls... except some, maybe. Time to study now. I have to do some problems for Almakfish.

NOVEMBER 10

This was my first day out and I went straight to school. The kids said they had a great time at the demonstration. They said that it's all the rage to be seen out in the street with naked legs and wearing gym suits, even the girls. I think that's a good idea, because skirts raise a lot of dust and they're just a waste of material, and women wear pants anyway. The kids said that all the girls who are members of the Komsomol wore shorts at the demonstration.

The minute I got in a note was passed to me. It said: "Somebody missed you. (Signed) Guess who?" I haven't the faintest intention of guessing.

I passed my math test. That just goes to show you what staying at home does for your studies.

NOVEMBER 11

Today's Sunday. We had a very long general meeting. First, the old pupils' committee reported on the work done. Everything was proceeding as usual when Seryozha Blinov, the chairman of the former pupils' committee, suddenly announced that this was his last term on the committee and that he never wanted to be elected again, because, as he said, the pupils' committee is "an invalid on skwork crutches", meaning that it can't do anything before it gets the skworks' approval. Since Seryozha said "skworks" instead of "teachers", some of the skworks protested. Then Big Zina took the floor and asked Seryozha whether he felt that the pupils should disregard the teachers altogether and not even look upon them as people, or would he agree to the fact that teachers were human beings after all? Seryozha got terribly mad at her. He didn't want to answer, but the kids talked him into saying something. So he said that greeting teachers and rising when they enter was all a throwback and he, for one,

wouldn't do either any more. Then Big Zina said that she always thought him to be an exemplary pupil and was surprised and wondered what had gotten into him all of a sudden. Besides, she wanted to know whether he considered combing one's hair and washing a throwback to old times, too? Seryozha got mad at her again and wouldn't say another word. Then Almakfish got up and said that this didn't surprise him at all and that *from a quantitative point of view this was a sign of the abundance of the epoch, while from a qualitative point of view it stood apart from good and evil.* I have a funny feeling that this was exactly what he said to me when I had that run-in with Yelnikitka. It had nothing to do with anything then, either.

Despite what the skworks said, Seryozha Blinov stuck to his guns and most of the kids supported him. Just a few of the girls seemed to be on the skworks' side, including Lina and Black Zoya. At any rate, every time Seryozha said something, she'd go humph-humph!

After this precedent we elected the new pupils' committee. I was very surprised and very much against being elected, but I was anyway. Sylphida Dubinina was also elected. She's lucky: whenever I'm elected to something, she's elected, too. But that's all right, because you can get along with her and she's not as bad as the other girls. The pupils' committee is the highest body of self-government, standing over the hygiene committee and the social affairs committee. Actually, this is a lot of hogwash, because actually they both do as they please.

I bumped into Yelnikitka in the hall and she said, "When do you intend to take your test, citizen Ryabtsev?"

And I said, "As soon as I'm ready, citizen Kaurova."

"Everyone has a new assignment for November, and you're lagging behind."

So I said, "I still have time." And I was off. I can't stand her!

NOVEMBER 13

No sooner was I elected than a serious case came up. There's been some stealing in school since the beginning of the term. Last month somebody stole a senior's draughting set, and lunch money has been disappearing. Now Vanya Petukhov was robbed of six rubles. He left the money in his coat pocket in the cloakroom, and when he went back for it, the money was gone. When Seryozha Blinov was passing the cloakroom he saw Alyosha Chikin fooling around there. The first thing we wanted

to do was ask Alyosha what he was doing there, but by then he'd vanished. That's why Sylphida and I were delegated, as members of the pupils' committee, to go to Alyosha's house. His drunken father, who's a shoemaker, opened the door and asked us what we wanted.

After we told him what had happened he said, "He did it, that son-of-a-bitch! He's a thief. Wait'll I get my hands on him!"

We were sorry we'd told him. What if Alyosha didn't take the money? He was in for a beating now. Sylva and I waited for him out in the yard. It was pitch dark by the time he finally got back.

I went over to him and said, "Why'd you leave school so early today?"

"What's it to you?"

"I'm asking because some money was stolen."

He shoved me aside and said, "Get out of my way! I'm going home."

"Better not. Not until we talk this over, because your old man is waiting for you." Then he shouted, "Oh! So you told him? Well, I didn't take your lousy six rubles!"

He went straight for my face and started socking me. Just then Sylphida grabbed him from behind. We shoved him up against the wall.

"How'd you know it was six rubles? We didn't say how much it was."

He began to bawl and curse, and he spat at us. That's when Sylva and I noticed he was reeking of homebrew vodka. He wrenched free and ran away. It was too dark for us to catch him, so we went back to school. All the other members of the pupils' committee were waiting for us. We told them about what had happened. Everybody became still more suspicious of him now, but we didn't have any proof.

Yelnikitka was the skwork on duty today and she said, "Why didn't you search him?"

We told her why, but, actually, the thought never occurred to us. We decided to put the matter off till tomorrow.

NOVEMBER 14

Alyosha Chikin came to school this morning just as if nothing had happened. We took him straight to the pupils' committee.

"What were you doing in the cloakroom?"

"I wanted to get my sandwich out of my pocket."

"Then why'd you run away before school ended yesterday?"

"I had to go home."

"But you didn't go home. Ryabtsev and Dubinina went over and didn't find you there."

"I was home, but then I left."

"And why'd you stink of homebrew?"

"They're lying."

"How'd you know that exactly six rubles was stolen?"

"Who said I knew?"

That was a downright lie, because we never told him how much it was. He had been the first to say it. Well, at this everyone saw that he'd stolen the money and nobody wanted to talk to him. But we didn't know what to do. So far, the skworks are keeping mum. That's a good thing as long as they don't interfere. But, on the other hand, we can't just let it slide. The committee discussed the case for a long time and couldn't come to any decision, so we broke up the meeting and went home. If we can't decide on anything tomorrow, either, we'll have to take the case to the general meeting. Seryozha Blinov told me he didn't think anything would come of it, and it's Vanya's own fault, because he left the money in his coat pocket. Seryozha's right about that, but we can't stand for things being stolen at school. And what's the use of the pupils' committee if no decisions are ever taken?

NOVEMBER 15

Big Zina joined the fight. She called Alyosha Chikin in and gave him a two-hour dressing-down. He rushed out of her office and ran for it. We could see he'd been crying. After he ran away from school we members of the committee went to Big Zina and asked her what right she had to get mixed up in matters that only concern the pupils and to go over the heads of the pupils' committee. She said that, in the first place, she was responsible for law and order in the school and, besides, she wasn't barging in. She said she'd simply been trying to influence Alyosha. That's what she says! We'll see what the general meeting says about it.

Yelnikitka herded us into her lab, where she has a microscope, to explain the reproduction of ferns.

That's when I said, "How do you think man came into being? And the rest of the world, too?"

She got all red in the face, and said, "In a biological way, of course."

"Which one?"

She started telling us all about cells, but that's not what I meant, so I said, "Does God exist or not?"

She got red in the face again and said, "Some people believe he does, and some don't. Each person has to decide this question for himself."

That's when Black Zoya screamed, "I know why he said that! He wants to prove that God doesn't exist! But I believe in God, and that's my own business, and nobody can tell me not to."

I wanted to say that nobody had any intention of forbidding her to and that this was a matter of principle and had to be discussed as such, but she didn't even want to listen. I even thought she might fall down and faint. But then Yelnikitka started talking about ferns again. Zoya calmed down, and I decided to put off the discussion for a while.

After the class was over Sylva came up to me and said, "You know, they go to church."

"Who?"

"Zoya and Lina."

"Do you?"

"No. I don't believe in God, even though it makes my mother mad. My mother does, but my father doesn't. I love them both, but they keep quarreling about this all the time. Daddy took the icons down, and then Mother hung them up again. I used to be on her side, but then he made me see things his way."

"What does he do?"

"He's a type-setter. He was against Soviet power before and even went on strike, but now he's all for it. That's what makes my mother so mad. All the women in our house hate him for that. When they go out to hang up their wash they always talk about him."

"Did you use to go to church too before?"

"Yes. My name used to be Dunya. Then Daddy and I decided that we'd change it to Sylphida, and that's when I stopped going to church. My mother can't stand my new name. She says it's a heathen name."

After some thinking I told Sylva to call me Vladlen. She said she would.

Black Zoya was taking her October math test today and suddenly flopped into a faint. She doesn't surprise anybody any more when she does that. We sprinkled some water on her face and gave her a whiff of smelling salts, and then she got up. We raised the question of making her stop that habit of fainting at a meeting of the pupils' committee and I said I would tackle the job. The kids said I should see that the method I used wouldn't be harmful. I know that without being told.

The pupils' committee met to discuss Alyosha Chikin. He hasn't been coming to school, and he's run away from home. Nobody knows where he is. We resolved to tell the school council that the pupils' committee doesn't object to the militia searching for him, on condition that they're not told he stole any money.

I told Nikpetozh that I want to join the Komsomol and he approved. He said that if he were my age he'd join, too.

Then I asked him what dialectics is, and he gave me a story from the paper to read. Here it is:

THE DIALECTICS OF LIFE

1

Kultyapich liked to join the young people on the veranda, but this only happened on holidays. Kultyapich would appear during tea or dinner, with his smelly pipe clamped between his teeth. He would sit down on the railing, spit a stream of yellow saliva and begin to philosophize.

"I look at you and the way you live and can't get used to it. All you boys or, say, girls are young and strong, but you spend all your time running around and haven't really found your place in life yet."

"What do you mean by that?" Nikolka said, winking at his friends.

"I don't think you'll understand. You all work at the factory, and that means you have no real understanding. Now you take this, for instance: what's more important, the engine-driver or the engine? Hm? What do you say?"

"The engine, of course. The engine-driver will get old and die, but the engine will still be there."

"It just goes to show what a damn fool you are. Who invented the engine? You think that's the devil's doing, or what? Man invented the engine! If there'd be no people, where'd you get your engine? Here's another one for you. Now you take money, for instance. What's money without people? Nothing, that's what!"

"But what's a man without money?" Nikolka said, trying to get back at him.

"Everything! Who invented what? Did money invent the human mind, or did the human mind invent money? Hm? What do you say to that? See? That's what I say. Diogenes said that everything will die, but glory will remain. Though I'm not Diogenes, but just an old bombardier, I say that, too."

"How do you know what Diogenes said?"

"There's quite a bit I know, my boy! Here's another one for you. Now you take your friend Vasily. He's a serious fellow. A smart fellow. He always has his nose in a book. Not like you at all. All you care about is fooling around."

At this Vasily Grushin spoke up. "You're wrong there, Kultyapich. We're all of us busy here. I'm busy studying, and Nikolka's busy entertaining the girls. They'd have all run away long ago if not for him. Aren't I right, girls?"

"Sure. Things would be pretty dead around here if it was up to a bookworm like you," Lena Spirina said saucily. "We spent the whole winter studying. We've a right to enjoy ourselves in the summertime."

"Try looking at things from a dialectical point of view, Kultyapich," Fyodor Zaitsev teased. "Then it'll all be clear to you."

"What's that? What's dialectical? You tell me." The old man was very fond of foreign words.

"I can't explain it in so many words. Life teaches us what it means."

"Well, I'll tell you the way I see it," Kultyapich concluded, sending a stream of saliva past rosy-cheeked Lena. "Life's a hard trial. And a woman's like a brake."

The young people burst out laughing.

Lena Spirina was semi-literate. She had come from a village but three months before. Being a high-spirited, sociable girl, she soon started going with the Komsomol group at the factory and moved to the country commune with them for the summer. To tell the truth, learning came very hard to her. That is why she had only mastered the alphabet and the simplest words by summer. She also attended the talks at the political study circle, but since she did not know how to read, they were not very enlightening to her.

Vasily Grushin decided to tutor her but soon saw it was of no use.

Lena, true to the village customs, was ready to spend the summer nights out walking and singing till dawn, till their commuter train left for the city and the factory, but it was impossible to make her open a book. Worse still, she was always ready to listen to Vasily's long talks on politics and the link between the workers and the peasants, none of which she would remember by the next day. Vasily tried cunning: he started telling her fairy-tales, where the usual devils and villains were joined by fascists and confronted by Komsomol members, but this failed completely, for Lena scoffed, "What sort of a story is that? Old Granny Gunyavikha back home is a wonderful story-teller. You should hear her stories." And she'd go on to tell him one.

Vasily gave up after that. He decided to bide his time. Lena continued going out till dawn every day with the boys and girls who were of a like mind. She nicknamed Vasily Bookworm.

The young people first met Kultyapich when they were out strolling one short summer night. He was a night watchman and patrolled the streets of the summer colony. He was very curious about the young city people.

"Who are you?" he said one evening soon after as he passed their cottage.

"Komsomol members."

"Oh," he said and added respectfully, "That makes you sort of Lenin's grandchildren. I must say he was a fine man! And you should never forget what a great man he was and honor him forever and ever, amen!"

"We do. And who are you?"

"Me? I'm an old bombardier," he replied proudly. "I'm the night watchman here. My name's Kirill Potapych."

From that day on they started calling him Kultyapich for short.

Actually, there would be nothing more to say if not for a tragic event that startled the entire summer colony and struck at the heart of the young people's commune. One Sunday Vasily Grushin stayed on at the cottage while everyone else went off for a walk. He stretched out in the sun in his shorts with a geometry book opened before him, for he wanted to enroll in the workers' evening high school that autumn. The sun was blazing, quite as if it wanted its ultra-violet rays to penetrate his very innards. Vasily shooed away an occasional fly and absorbed one theorem after another courageously.

A sudden burst of shouting and excited voices nearby rent the calm of the sunny day. He cocked an ear and made out the words: "Hurry!... Yes, somebody drowned.... Who? Where? Goodness!" He jumped up and raced across the street and through the woods to the pond.

It was a deep old overgrown pond. There was a crowd on the bank, chattering about the capsized boat and the people who had drowned. Vasily elbowed his way through to where some of the boys from the cottage were. They were wet and shivering. "Lena drowned. She didn't know how to swim," one of them said shakily.

"Right in the middle, too. We were going to change places and the boat tipped over."

"We kept diving for her, and we're all in. Nobody has any strength left," Nikolka said morosely.

"The boys have gone to get another boat and boat-hooks." "It'll take ages," someone said. "There's boat on the other side, but it's chained."

"Where'd it happen?" Vasily asked breathlessly, and when the direction was pointed out to him he dashed into the water. He was a good swimmer and counted on finding Lena quickly. He was soon near the middle and there he turned to ask for directions. He swam off to the left a bit and dived down. The pond was very deep and the bottom was swampy. It was covered with silt and water weeds. He felt around in a wide circle and soon got a cramp from the icy water, for the pond was fed by springs. His lungs were ready to burst. Vasily decided to come up for air. He shoved off from the bottom forcefully and began to rise when he felt his legs becoming entangled in the weeds. He tried to wrench free and pulled at them once or twice. Then, forgetting what he was doing, he breathed in a lungful of water. Bright orange sparks burst inside his head. The water poured into

his nose. It filled his ears and his stomach. His arms thrashed frantically, but the water weeds seemed to be gripping his brain, his mind, his consciousness.

A boat was approaching quickly from the other side. The boys in it soon found Lena and pulled her up by her dress with a boat-hook.

She was revived. Meanwhile, the boys started diving for Vasily. They found him and freed him from the strangling embraces of the weeds. Neither artificial respiration nor any amount of effort helped. Vasily Grushin was dead.

4

"Now you tell me, what's more important — the post office or the mailman?" Kulyapich said, starting out in his usual way. He was sitting on the railing like he always did. "The mailman can live without the post office, but what's the post office without a mailman? Hm? How about that?"

No one said anything. A month had passed since Vasily's death. All the merriment had gone out of the summer commune.

"The post office can manage without a mailman," Nikolka said in a voice that was unusually serious. "There are radios now, and you can get all the news over the radio."

"But how will your radio station work without someone to run it? You need a radioman, otherwise your radio won't be more than an empty box. So you see, you're wrong. An engine without an engine-driver is just the same as cabbage soup without salt."

The conversation lagged. Kulyapich finished his glass of tea and said, "Vodka's much better. And it's good for a toothache. Well, I'll be going." He lumbered off. However, when he had crossed the front garden he turned back and said in a mysterious voice, "What's happened to Lena? She was always the one who sang the loudest and laughed the most. Look at her now. She can't get her nose out of her book. There she is, out in the garden, reading again. I don't want to sound curious, but is her heart broken on account of Vasily?"

"You're wrong there, Kulyapich. There was nothing between Lena and him. I guess she started thinking about life and death."

"I'll tell you what it is," Fyodor Zaitsev said. "I don't know whether you'll understand though. You keep saying that a woman's a brake. The way we see it, ignorance is a brake. Vasily was

always studying. He drowned because of her, and now she's begun to study. That's the dialectics of life, my friend."

"Dialectics," Kulyapich repeated slowly. "Dialectics, you say? What exactly do you mean?"

"It's like this. You say an engine can't exist without an engine-driver, right?"

"Right."

"There! It's the same with books. Vasily drowned, but his books remained. And Lena is also a human being. Well, she took up his books, and now she's studying."

"I see. So that's what you mean. So that's dialectics. It's like one bombardier being killed and another one taking his place by the gun. I see." He crossed the front garden again, went over to Lena, patted her head and said, "You study, girl. You learn all that dialectics. That'll show you your place in life. The way I see it, there's no life without dialectics."

NOVEMBER 24

The moment I heard somebody shout that Zoya had fainted again I ran outside, got something, raced back in again and asked where she was. They said she was in the auditorium. I ran there and saw her lying on the floor like she always does with her teeth clenched and looking pale. So I said, "Raise her up a bit." The fellows raised her up, and I stuck a handful of snow down her back. She jumped up and screamed. Everybody roared. Just then Yelnikitka came running with the smelling salts.

"What's the matter?"

"Zoya fainted and Kostya Ryabtsev cured her."

"How?"

"With snow."

Yelnikitka pounced on me, saying I was very cruel and a terrible friend and she'd bring the matter up at the next general meeting.

Just then Big Zina came over, had a look at Zoya and at me and said, "Don't worry Yelena Nikitichna. I can assure you that Zoya won't faint any more."

Zoya's eyes flashed. She started humming again and then ran away.

Big Zina said to me, "Next time I want you to tell me beforehand!"

And she turned and left. What do I need her permission for? If I'm a committee member it means it's my duty.

It'll soon be time to take the November tests, but I haven't passed all my October tests yet. My duties as a coomittee member take up an awful lot of my time. Besides, the editorial board wants me to write for the wall newspaper, but I don't have any free time at all.

NOVEMBER 26

New members will be admitted to the Komsomol, and Sylva and I handed in our applications. They say that our school group will soon be affiliated with some factory group. This is very important, because our school meetings are as boring as hell.

NOVEMBER 27

Vanya Petukhov and I went over to see the waifs and this is what happened. I'm a great one for secrecy, and this had to be done in secret, because if the skworks ever find out it could lead to a lot of trouble.

This is what happened. Vanya called for me at about nine, as if we were going to the movies. It was very cold out. It must have been 20° below. We came to the caved-in cellar, but they wouldn't let us in at first, though they finally did. The cellar is huge, and it's as cold down there as it is outside. That's why there were little bonfires going in the corners. They were shielded by crates and junk so that the flames couldn't be seen from the street. It was very scary creeping along and climbing over the ruins, just like sleuths tracking someone down in the movies.

At first, they left us alone, because they know Vanya and they've accepted him. They were all dressed in awful rags and they stank terribly, even in the cold air. There are quite a lot of them living in the cellar and warming themselves by the fires, because there isn't room for all of them around just one fire. The minute they saw Vanya they crowded around and told him to read them a story.

Vanya sat down by one of the fires and read them the fairy-tale about the silver saucer and the red apple. It's such a stupid story! I never thought such a stupid story would ever be put in a book. Then they asked him to read another, but he said he wouldn't, so they got out some homebrew vodka and treated

us. Vanya had a few sips, but I said I wouldn't. Then they started playing cards and just as we got up to leave, somebody grabbed hold of me and pulled me closer to the fire. I wouldn't go, but he kept dragging me closer and closer.

Then he shouted, "He's a stoolie, fellows!" It was Alyosha Chikin, though he was so filthy and ragged I didn't recognize him at first. "Why'd you come snooping around here, you rat?"

"Ah, go to hell," I said and tried to shake him off. Vanya was right there to back me up. We broke free, but they were after us. We started fighting. Somebody socked me in the cheek with something hard. I yelled. The pain was awful. We finally escaped. They were going to chase after us, but the streets were lighted and there was a militiaman nearby. My cheek and eye were very painful and were beginning to swell.

Vanya and I had to decide whether to tell anybody about Alyosha Chikin or not and we decided not to, because it might get him into a lot of trouble. Besides, he can't go home, since his father'll probably kill him, what with everything that's happened.

Vanya said the gang in the cellar are known as "trippers". A fellow hides behind a fence while another fellow strolls up and down the street, minding his own business. As soon as they see a well-dressed lady the one who's out strolling throws himself at her feet and trips her! Then the other dashes out and snatches her purse, and they both scam. There are pickpockets, too, and some of the boys rob apartments. Some of them can't even speak Russian. All they speak is Tatar, but they're just as good at thieving.

By the time I got home my black eye was a beaut. Dad wanted to know where I'd got it, and I said I slipped and fell. He put a copper coin on it. The swelling went down some, but it'll still be pretty bad tomorrow.

NOVEMBER 28

Naturally, all the kids wanted to know where I got my black eye, and especially Sylva. I finally told her to go to hell. Yelnikitka looked at me suspiciously. I could tell she was sneering at me, but I didn't want to start anything again, so I didn't say a thing.

There was a good article in the wall newspaper today about social duties. Here it is:

"We are studying according to the Dalton Plan and are given our assignments in each subject for the coming month. We're supposed to prepare for the tests by ourselves. For instance, a teacher will say that we have to read something in a certain book, but you can't get the book anyplace and it's impossible to buy a new book for every assignment.

"Then, aside from our studies, there is our social work. Those boys and girls who are best at this are appointed or elected. This is very wrong, because it means some pupils are loaded down with social duties, while others don't have any at all.

"It's always so noisy in the labs that it's difficult to concentrate, and that's why everyone has to study at home. School is out at 7 p.m., and anyone who has no social duties can go home, but those who are loaded down with them have to stay on. Naturally, you can't get anything done in the evening, and so you have to come back in the morning when the first shift is at school. Then, when our second shift comes to school, we can't get anything done again because it's so noisy in the labs. And this is what happens every single day. A whole month has gone by, and now it's time to hand in our assignments, but nothing is ready. However, those pupils who have no social duties can do their assignments whenever they want to at home and hand them in on time."

There was more to the article, but this is enough to see that the committee members never have a minute to spare. Besides, there's the editorial board, the school decorating committee, the pupils' committee and the time we have to waste talking to the skworks on behalf of the group. I hope that damn Dalton drops dead!

NOVEMBER 30

I have to hand in my assignments for November tomorrow and, naturally, I can't and don't know when I'll be able to. Some of the other kids are in the same boat. It's a good thing the pupils' committee's term of office is nearly up, because I'd never be able to catch up otherwise. My only hope is for the winter vacation. Sylva doesn't think she'll pass any of the tests either, and all because she's been so busy with committee affairs. That damn Dalton!

Sylva and I spent the whole evening out walking, and she told me a lot about herself. She said her mother and father are getting divorced and she doesn't know whom to go to live

with. So far, her parents keep fighting all the time, and that's why she tries to stay away from home. Then she asked me what I thought a person's goal in life should be. I told her that a person should live a useful life and fight for the establishment of communism all over the world. Then she said there were times when she was so unhappy she even thought of committing suicide. I said that that was stupid and that there are people who are much worse off than we are, like the waifs, for instance. And besides, people who commit suicide are rotten intellectuals. In the old pre-revolutionary schools kids sometimes committed suicide because of the skworks, but things are different now and we can stand up to the skworks. Besides, there's the Kom-somol and we'll probably be accepted, because we both come from proletarian families. She stopped worrying, and I saw her home.

THE THIRD NOTEBOOK

December

DECEMBER 3

Sylva and I are candidate members of the Komsomol. That's fine. The only drawback is that we have to attend Komsomol meetings when we have no time to spare to begin with. Oh, well! I'll manage somehow.

DECEMBER 4

A militiaman came to school today and summoned Big Zina. He said, "Is Alexei Chikin one of your pupils?" She said he was. "Sign this paper and I'll hand him over to you, because he won't tell us his address and we can't keep him at the station."

"How did he land in the militia station?" she wanted to know.

"We got him during a raid on waifs."

Then Big Zina said, "No, I won't accept him. Take him to the center for homeless children."

Some of the kids heard the conversation and spread the news. Then the bell for a general meeting rang. Kids came running from all over. They left their books, and those that had been reciting in the labs didn't even bother to finish whatever they were saying. The skworks became goggle-eyed. That's because everybody usually knows beforehand if there's going to be a general meeting. But here, right in the middle of everything, the bell rang.

Everybody gathered in the assembly hall. They were shouting at the top of their voices. Then Big Zina came in. She looked

very pale. The other skworks looked surprised and uncomfortable, too.

"Who rang the bell for a general meeting?" Big Zina wanted to know.

"I did," Seryozha Blinov said.

"What right did you have to do it during classes?"

"Every right, because we just found out that there's been a terrible injustice and the whole school wants to protest." He was so excited he was stuttering.

"What injustice?"

"The school authorities don't want to accept Chikin. He's our comrade, and you ought to ask our opinion."

At this everybody started shouting, "That's right! Down with the skworks!"

Big Zina raised her hand and stood there like that for a long time because it was so noisy. Then she said, "We'll have to discuss this in detail. You say it's unjust, but I couldn't accept him because, in the first place, this is not a children's home and he has no place to live and, secondly, he was living with the waifs, and that means he may have caught some disease and you may all catch it from him. And, finally, since he has a mother and a father he should be sent home and not brought to school."

At this I got up and said, "You can't send him home, because his father will surely kill him. He's a drunk, and that means Chikin has a hell of a life at home if he ran away to live in a cellar."

"Which cellar?" Big Zina wanted to know.

"An ordinary one."

"How do you know about it?"

"Just because I was there and saw him."

At this everybody shouted, "Bravo, Ryabtsev! Good for you!"

And I said, "Quit making so much noise. If I'm a committee member, it means it's my duty."

"Anyway, the school authorities don't want him, because the principal sent Chikin off to the center without asking our opinion. Besides, we want you to send someone to the militia station right now and bring him back here," Seryozha Blinov said.

"What'll we do with him?" Big Zina said.

"We'll see. We'll go to his house and tell his father he has no right to beat him."

"What makes you so sure his father will listen to you?" Yelnikitka snapped.

"He'll listen to us before he'll listen to you," Seryozha said.

"At any rate, we want you to tell us whether you think self-government is of any importance here or not."

"Yes! Yes! That's what we want to know!" everybody shouted.

Then Big Zina said, "I'm surprised at your lack of discipline. You've disrupted the classes and called a general meeting. All right, we understand, since this is an emergency. But how is this general meeting being conducted? You have neither a chairman nor a secretary. All the questions are thrown in together. You wanted to discuss Chikin's case, but now you're on to another question. I refuse to remain and am leaving, because I think such a meeting is a disgrace to the school." At this she left.

Yelnikitka followed her, and then Almakfish and the other skworks edged out. That left Nikpetozh. He sat there but didn't utter a single word. The kids were quiet for a while and then started shouting again.

Seryozha banged his fist on the table and said, "I personally think that having a chairman for a meeting is a throwback, too. Actually, we don't need any chairman. I'll tell you what, kids: I propose that only those who don't accept the kind of self-government we have stay on. And then we'll decide what to do. Everybody else can leave. That includes the teachers, too."

Nikpetozh got right up and left. So did some of the little kids. Black Zoya and Lina G. were the only girls who stormed out. Everyone else remained and decided to form a union. The Union decided not to recognize self-government, but to draw up its own charter and act according to it. Compulsory greeting and rising are to be abolished. Anyone can go into a lab, the assembly hall or the gym in his hat if he wants to. In all other things we're to act according to the charter which Seryozha Blinov and some of the other kids are going to draw up.

Life immediately became beautiful. By the way, my term as a pupils' committee member is also up.

DECEMBER 5

There are two parties at school now: the School and the Union. A lot of the kids turned out to be on the side of the skworks. The School held a general meeting today to elect

a new pupils' committee, and half of the kids attended. The Union also held a meeting. We adopted the Union Charter. According to our Charter, nobody is subordinate to anyone, and self-discipline has been introduced. All sorts of nonsense like compulsory greeting have been abolished, but every Union member has to keep his own behavior in check. For instance, there's to be no fighting or shouting during the lessons. We elected Seryozha Blinov Commissar of Foreign Affairs to negotiate with the skworks and the School Party.

Seryozha's first task was to make sure the skworks agreed to Alyosha Chikin coming back to school from the center for homeless children. There was a meeting afterward and everybody made a speech.

Then Seryozha took me aside and said that since Nikpetozh liked me, I should go up to him and ask him what he thought about the Union, and also what the other skworks thought about it. Naturally, I agreed, though I can't understand why we have to worry about what the skworks think, since we have nothing to do with them and they have nothing to do with us. I went all the same, though. This is what Nikpetozh said, "I consider your experiment an interesting one, and I think that you will soon see that a person cannot live without discipline."

I told him that we had introduced self-discipline, and he said, "Self-discipline is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it seems to be good, because it does away with outside force, but, on the other, it's much more binding than discipline imposed from the outside. Just think, you have to keep watching yourself at every step in order not to get into trouble. You'll soon become very tired of it."

Then I asked him what Big Zina thought about it.

"You underestimate her. You think she's all for coercion in school and is your enemy. But you're wrong. She likes children very much, and if she's strict, it's only because she has so much responsibility. She doesn't want to interfere in your Union. What she said was, 'Let them become convinced of the futility of their actions.'"

I passed all this on to Seryozha. He listened, but didn't say anything. After school I saw Sylphida to her house and then she saw me to my house. On the way we talked about the Union. She said she didn't believe it'll hold out for long and she only joined because of her friends. She also said that life is great now, and I said I thought so, too. We even shook hands when we parted, something we never did before.

DECEMBER 6

Everything seems to be coming along nicely. The skworks pretend they don't notice the Union, and we act as if we don't notice the skworks. Since the Union Charter says there's to be no mistreatment of the School kids, we don't pick on them, especially since most of them are younger than us anyway. The older ones are for everything we're against.

I'm cramming now to be free during our winter vacation. Nikpetozh passed me for November. Math and biology are the hardest subjects.

DECEMBER 7

Vanya Petukhov didn't come to school today, so I went to see him. He was lying in bed. He's been badly beaten. The waifs beat him up, because they thought he squealed on them and the raid was his doing. They took his cigarette tray away. He says he's been thinking of getting a job at the factory, especially since they're taking on more young workers now than they used to. I asked him what about school, and he said that the young workers have a six-hour day and they get time off for studying. His family was weeping, because he's practically the only one earning any money. It was awfully depressing, so I left.

DECEMBER 8

I was passing through the gym when a fight broke out between the School and the Union. It started when they tripped up Volodya Shmerts. Our fellows ran to the rescue, and it was a free-for-all. Naturally, it wasn't a real fight. We were just horsing around.

Suddenly, Big Zina came charging in. She stamped her feet and screamed, "Stop it! Stop it this minute!" Naturally, we stopped, and she flew at us, saying we were turning the school into a back alley, and that such animosity was abominable, and that the much-touted self-discipline of the Union was showing its true colors at last. That was too much for me, so I said that self-discipline had nothing to do with it, because we hadn't really been fighting, just slapping each other around. She wouldn't even let me finish the sentence

and said that she'd discuss the matter with me at the school council. We'll see.

I finally passed my October math test. There's not much left now, and I'm cramming like mad.

DECEMBER 10

We had a great time, because all the Union kids went out to play soccer in the yard during the long recess. It's not very cold, and the snow is packed down hard, so it's fun to play. The School kids were green with envy. They were dying to play, but according to their rules soccer is out until spring, at least in the school yard. They can play other games, like the ones the gym teacher shows us, but no soccer, because, as Big Zina says, "Soccer has a bad effect on one's studies."

Recess ended, but we went right on playing. Too bad it gets dark so early, otherwise I could have gone on playing forever. I scored ten goals. I'm the right half. At first the girls joined us, but as soon as we set up two regular teams we got rid of them.

DECEMBER 11

The day before yesterday I saw Black Zoya and Lina G. coming out of church. At our Komsomol meeting yesterday we decided to step up anti-religious propaganda in school. That was why I went to the biology lab when there were a lot of kids there and said to Yelnikitka, "Can you please tell me about God? Does God exist or not?"

"I've spoken to you about this before, Ryabtsev, and told you that some people believe in God and some don't. It's something that each person has to decide for himself."

"I mean in general."

"There's no general outlook."

"What does biology say about it?"

"Biology is not concerned with matters pertaining to religion."

And that was that. But I'll show Yelnikitka up. When I walked off down the hall Black Zoya caught up with me and said, "Wait!"

I stopped.

She was all hunched over and hissed, "I hate you! I don't even think you're a human being. But I'm very sorry for you. I'm warning you. You'll have to pay for this."

"Whom am I supposed to pay?"

"You'll find out, don't worry. The holy angels have turned away from you."

I laughed so hard it made my stomach ache. I slapped her back and said, "Pass this on to your holy angels as a present from me!"

She started humphing and turned away. Naturally, I didn't chase after her. I don't like her. I can't stand her. She smells of incense.

DECEMBER 12

I parted with my good friend Vanya Petukhov today. This was his last day at school. He's going to work at a factory. I started telling him about the latest developments at school, but I could see he wasn't very interested. His bruises have healed. He'll be getting twenty-three rubles and sixty kopecks. He said he'd never make more selling cigarettes. I'm awfully sorry he's leaving. In the first place, he's a swell friend. Friends like him are hard to find. And, besides, he's very smart and very kind. I think that being friends with a fellow is very different than being friends with a girl, even though she's a smart girl like Sylva. We talk about many things, but there's a lot I can't talk to her about, because she won't understand. Besides, I could never go to see the waifs with her. She might like to go, but they'd beat her up, and she doesn't know how to fight back. Then, for instance, girls don't really know how to play soccer, even though they try hard. To top it all, they're cry-babies. Actually, no matter which way you look at it, there's so much that stands in the way of really being friends. That's not at all like being friends with a fellow. I'm sorry Vanya's leaving. I know we'll see each other, but it won't be the same.

DECEMBER 13

There was a new precedent today and all on account of the Union. Sylphida D. went to take her November math test and Almakfish flunked her, although she said she answered all his questions and got the problems right. Then she said, "The only reason you flunked me is because I belong to the Union."

Almakfish got as mad as a hornet. He said she was a good-for-nothing and chased her out of the lab. That was an outright insult, so we sent a delegation to Big Zina, to make Almakfish apologize to Sylphida. I was a member of the delegation. Almakfish was in the teachers' room when we got there.

After we told him why we were there he said, "All right. I lost my temper. I'll apologize when Dubinina apologizes for suspecting me of having ulterior motives."

So I said, "I don't know whether you had any ulterior motives or not, but every kid in school knows that you hate Dubinina and pick on her."

It looked like Almakfish was going to start foaming at the mouth. He began shouting, saying I was rude and uncivilized, and if I wasn't kept in check he'd leave school, because it was impossible to teach here. And he slammed a book down on a desk and stormed out. Big Zina told me to stay on in the teachers' room for a talk. She said that if things continued in this way it'd be impossible to study, and that we're all so taken up with our Union we forgot our main and sole goal, which was studying.

I told her I agreed, but it wasn't just us who were forgetting things. I told her the skworks kept forgetting that we were people just like them, except that we were younger and maybe didn't have as much experience. For instance, no one has a right to call us children or rude, uncivilized boys, or good-for-nothings, etc. And that this would always cause precedents. That's when Big Zina said I was using the wrong word, and that what I meant was "incidents" not "precedents". In the end, we decided that I'd apologize to Almakfish tomorrow and would try to influence Sylphida in this respect.

The Komsomol meeting resolved to propose that the skworks and the Union set up a conciliatory commission to liquidate the conflict. Seryozha Blinov was against it, but when he was asked whether he really wanted the school to be split into two parties he had to shut up.

DECEMBER 14

The conciliatory commission, with representatives of our Komsomol group present, resolved to do away with compulsory greeting and rising. The pupils' committee's rights have been

expanded. For instance, cases concerning the pupils only will be handled by the pupils' committee and no one else. The teachers' council and the school council will only deal with those cases which concern both the skworks and the pupils. Soccer has been legalized.

The Union has been disbanded.

DECEMBER 16

Just as I was thinking that all this was over, the skworks drew up character references for all of the pupils at the last teachers' meeting before the winter vacation. Any pupil who wants to see what they wrote about him can. I not only read mine, I copied it out:

"*Kostya Ryabtsev*, 15 years old. His overall development is definitely below average for his age. He is a very poor learner and is unduly self-confident; will take on any extra-curricula assignment with lively interest and excitement, but will cool off just as quickly; is going through a period of adolescence and sexual development under great stress; is the slave of his instincts, which demand an immediate outlet. He is rude, abrupt and lacks self-control. The hyperactivity of his sensory and motor centers creates a painful and super-sensitive egocentricity. His subconscious attitude towards future adulthood provides food for his intellect and some control over his instincts. This process has produced some, although still hardly noticeable, results. He is a typical adolescent according to Stanley Hall."

Who the hell is Stanley Hall? Probably some rich guy like Dalton. I went to see Nikpetozh to find out what "egocentricity" means. He said it's just like egoism, only worse. Which means I'm an egoist. I don't think I am, but you can't make the skworks change their minds, ever. Actually, that's not very important. They wrote that I'm a poor learner. Maybe I am, but they didn't bother to explain why. It's all because of Dalton. If not for him, I could do as well as anybody else. Last year I was just as good as everybody else, and I had time left over for reading. But now, on account of Dalton, I don't have a moment to spare. Sylva's character reference is something like mine. I talked it over with her and she agrees that it's all Dalton's fault.

DECEMBER 18

Today was a great day, because Alyosha Chikin was brought back from the center for homeless children. We all cheered and tossed him up into the air. Then the pupils' committee met and resolved to send him home to his father, with Seryozha Blinov and me going along to conduct negotiations. Alyosha's very thin and pale, and doesn't talk much. He must have had a hard time living in that cellar and then at the center.

We went home with him after school. His father was sober. He was fixing a pair of boots, and his mother was mending something. The moment she saw Alyosha she began to wail. Seryozha was the first to speak to Chikin's father.

He said, "We've brought your son home, citizen Chikin. The school has vouched for him. Which means he'll be studying now and won't get into any trouble. But the school demands that you stop beating him."

Chikin's father put down his awl and said, "You have no damn business poking your noses into my life! I can kill him if I want to. I'll tell you this: he learned to steal in that school of yours, so that means you taught him."

"Nobody is taught to steal in our school. He got into trouble once, but he won't any more. We want you to know, citizen Chikin, that if you ever lay a finger on him you'll have the whole school to reckon with and, besides, we'll take you to court."

We left then, but stood outside for a while where we could look into the window. We saw Alyosha's mother give him something to eat. His father was talking to him, so everything seemed to be all right and we left.

DECEMBER 19

On the way to school I met Lina G. She came up to me and said, "This is the last time I'm saying this: will you talk to me or not?"

"This is the last time I'm telling you that I'll talk to you just like I do to all the other girls."

She scooted off. What a dope! She never asked me that before, but that's just what she said: "the last time". It was her idea to change seats, not mine, and now she wants me to talk to her! That must be Black Zoya's doing. Some girls are really crazy. When I got to school all the kids were busy studying in the labs. I started making the rounds, asking them

how things were, and I found out that most of them, like me, weren't ready to take the December tests. At least half of the kids haven't taken their November tests, either. I got a group of boys together and we went to the lavatory to smoke and discuss a certain project.

DECEMBER 21

Even if it takes me till tomorrow I'll try to write down everything that happened.

The day before yesterday we decided to do away with Dalton for good and spent most of yesterday getting ready. When the kids came to school today there were posters on all the walls and slips of paper, too, and what they said was:

"Down with Dalton!"

"To hell with that old capitalist Dalton!"

Naturally, the kids thought this was great. We gathered around the piano to rehearse a new song. I made it up:

*Though our blood becomes curdled,
Our cries will be dread,
We all hope you'll be murdered!
Oh, Dalton, drop dead!*

When the skworks started drifting in we greeted them with the song. They pretended they didn't hear us and went off to the labs, but nobody followed them to take the December tests, although several kids intended to. Instead, everyone ran outside. We'd made a straw dummy and put an old hat on it, and hung a sign around its neck that read: "THIS IS LORD DALTON". We set the dummy up in the middle of the yard so that it could be seen from the school windows and began prancing around it and singing. Then we set it on fire. The janitor came running, but when he saw there was no danger he laughed, too. As we sang the straw man blazed and crackled. Then we sang a ditty:

*Stinky Dalton, we hate you,
Rich old lord, get out! Skidoo!*

And we swarmed into the building, singing. The skworks were waiting for us. Big Zina asked us whether we wanted to have a general meeting or whether we were too excited and

would rather go home. Although some of the small fry shouted about going home, we all voted for a general meeting. So the bell rang for a general meeting.

I went to the lavatory before the meeting and saw a note lying on the floor outside. I picked it up and read it. This is what it said:

"We want everybody to know that we don't want to live any more. The reasons are: first of all, everybody teases us and nobody likes us. Besides, one of us just wants to go to Heaven and the other because of unrequited love. We forgive everyone. We want to be buried according to the customs of the church. And Kostya Ryabtsev can have my school lunch today. I forgive him, too. Whoever finds this note, don't show it to anybody. We want to be laid to rest in the same coffin. If the burial service can't be held for suicides, then at least we'd like the priest to say a few words. Farewell!"

"P. S. If you want to find our bodies, go to the physics lab."

"Lina G. and Zoya T."

I was so startled I ran back to where everyone was. On the way I noticed another note. It was tacked to the wall. This is what it said:

"Farewell. Farewell, our parents and boys and girls, and everybody else in school. Farewell! Our bodies are in the physics lab. *Lina and Zoya.*"

I ran to the auditorium where the general meeting had begun and shouted, "Hurry! To the physics lab! The girls are going to kill themselves! Maybe we'll still have time to stop them!"

Everyone jumped up and raced off to the physics lab, the skworks and all the kids. I was the first one in, but the lab was deserted. Everybody started opening closet doors and looking on the shelves, as if the girls might be hiding there. Then someone shouted, "They're here! In the auditorium!"

We all raced back, and there they were. They were very much alive and sitting at a desk, and sobbing. We pulled them to their feet. I finally felt I could breathe easily again, for all the time we'd been looking for them my throat had felt as if someone were choking me.

Lina and Zoya were taken to the teachers' room to be given some drops to calm them. The skworks and the kids surrounded me. They wanted to know how I had found out about it. Naturally, I showed them the notes and told them where I'd found them.

Then Big Zina said, "This is disgraceful! They left the notes on purpose. They never had any intention of committing suicide. They just did it to attract everyone's attention. I think they'll have to leave school."

I suddenly felt as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders. And I noticed that none of the kids had anything to say against this. Then Nikpetozh came back from the teachers' room and said he'd asked the girls how they'd intended to commit suicide and they said they'd wanted to die of coal gas poisoning. They had closed the flue in the brick oven before the coals had burned down and had then opened the firebox in the physics lab and had sat there, waiting. That's when I remembered the smoky smell there.

"Why did they leave the lab?" Big Zina asked.

"Because they got scared," Nikpetozh said and smiled. Everyone laughed.

Then Big Zina said to us, "Anyone who wants to commit suicide will never toss notes around in the hall, informing everyone of where it was all going to take place. And they certainly won't tack a note up on the wall."

We all agreed.

"Which means that this was all pretending. They were positive that someone would come to the physics lab before they became asphyxiated. I'll have to summon their parents."

Almakfish was standing in the crowd. He said, "Philosophically speaking, *this is a sign of the abundance of the epoch from a quantitative point of view, while from a qualitative point of view it stands apart from good and evil.*"

I heard him say this so many times, he sounded like a parrot.

Then Nikpetozh raised his hand for silence and said, "There's something I want to say. We are creating a new, free school. You've read and heard that before the Revolution the schools were very different from what they are now. Naturally, there are many difficulties on the road to a new type of school, as in any new undertaking. You've come out against the Dalton Plan today. You don't like this method. Do you really want to be forced to study, as was the case in the old schools? To have your brains dragged towards the light against your wishes?"

"I know it's difficult to study according to Dalton Plan, and perhaps we've been making mistakes in the way we've tackled it, but these mistakes can be remedied. He who makes no mistakes does not do anything, either. The new type of school

is not developing smoothly, as we would wish it to, but is running a jagged course, encountering countless obstacles.

"You've come out against self-government and against the Dalton Plan. These are all barriers, and together you and we are slowly overcoming them. Lina and Zoya wanted to set up a new barrier, but they are two silly girls and I'm very glad that you want to forgive them. However, I did not expect anything else from you, because you are new, free citizens, people who are evolving from the revolution, from a young and turbulent epoch.

"Zinaida Pavlovna doesn't seem willing to forgive the girls. I support your request and say that their parents should not be summoned and, especially, that they not be expelled. I think that we will be able to influence them favorably so that they forget all about committing suicide and will join us in coming to the realization that in the new, free schools there is not and cannot be room for gloom, despair and suicide. And so, Zinaida Pavlovna, the pupils and I appeal to you to forgive Zoya and Lina."

Big Zina wanted to say something, but we all started shouting.

"Forgive them! We'll be a good influence on them!"

We made so much noise she had to clap her hands over her ears. She waited until we stopped shouting, raised a hand and said, "The girls must undoubtedly be expelled. I believe the District Board of Education will insist on it. I, for one, would agree to overlook the incident and would even take it upon myself to vouch for them if everyone agrees to one small condition."

We looked at her warily.

"What is it?"

"I want you all to approach the Dalton Plan *consciously* and not sabotage it by senseless mischief. I'm sure you'll agree that today's incident was senseless. At the most, you can prove the *difficulty* of the Dalton Plan, but not its uselessness. And if you want to prove something, it should be done intelligently, and not by burning a straw effigy. This is my condition."

We were all silent.

Then Nikpetozh said, "Well, I think this condition is acceptable. At any rate, we now have an opportunity to discuss the Dalton Plan intelligently. If there has been no such discussion until now it is only because of the lack of time and other difficulties. Well, what do you say? Do we accept it?"

I looked around and saw everyone raising his hand. I gritted my teeth and raised mine, too.

"If that's the case, I forgive Zoya and Lina and will take the negotiations with the Board of Education upon myself," Big Zina said.

"Hooray!" we all yelled. The noise was deafening. "Hooray for Nikpetozh!"

Everyone cheered.



THE SECOND TRIMESTER

THE FOURTH NOTEBOOK January

JANUARY 1, 1924

I took part in the Komsomol Christmas at the workers' club with the other Komsomol members from my school. I think our group will be attached to this factory. Sylva and I got there at 10 p.m., but nothing had begun yet, even though all the seats were taken. It was hot and stuffy. At about 11 p.m. a lecturer showed up and began talking about all kinds of gods. Maybe it would have been interesting if he wasn't so tired and hoarse. Everybody watched him drinking water. When he got to about the middle of his lecture he suddenly looked at his watch and said, "I'm sorry, comrades, but I have to end now, because I still have five other lectures tonight." And he was off. If he wasn't going to finish the lecture, he shouldn't have begun.

There wasn't anything else for a long time after that, and I was beginning to feel sleepy when the curtain suddenly parted and the performance began. The performers were dressed as priests from different countries and they were arguing about whose god was the best. Then a worker came out with a broom and swept them all off the stage. The best and funniest actor was a fat monopolist who didn't really have anything to do with the plot. His long drawers kept slipping down from under his trousers and he kept hitching them up, but they kept slipping down. Everyone roared. I think that if you're going to present something on anti-religious propaganda there has to be something funny if you want it to be effective. But

dull reports and lectures, especially like this, only turn people away.

Sylva agrees with me.

Then there was an exhibition of gymnastics but not any better than what we do at school. It was presented by the young factory workers, and one pyramid even collapsed.

Then they invited us to their Komsomol meeting room, and the members of the Bureau proposed that we go out into the street and sing, and we did.

We passed the church during Mass and began to sing "Your Komsomol Christmas". Some bearded men came running out of the churchyard and began hollering at us. A big crowd gathered. Some of the people were on our side and some were against, and since more of them were against us, we left.

Yesterday, December 31st, I went to the primary school across the street to see a performance. I went there with Sylva, too. The name of the play was *Red Cinderella*. The story was about two rich sisters and their third sister who was a laundress. I don't know who made that up, but it's hard to believe, especially with the three of them living together in the same house. And then the two rich sisters rode off to a ball and Red Cinderella stayed home to wash the dishes. Then a chap in a red shirt appeared and gave Cinderella a leaflet. Cinderella read it, changed into her sister's dress and ran off.

The second act was supposed to be set in a ballroom. Cinderella's sisters and some other people in bright costumes were all dancing. Then Cinderella rushed in and began to dance. The prince started pestering her, but she was afraid of him and ran off and lost her shoe.

In the third act the prince went to their house to try the shoe on everyone, but it only fit Cinderella. He wanted to marry her, but suddenly the agitator in the red shirt appeared again. He said that an uprising had begun and he socked the prince. Then the prince raced off, right up the aisle, with the chap in the red shirt chasing after him. Then everyone who had been dancing at the ball and the three sisters all sang *the Internationale*.

A lot of it was hard to believe, but, after all, it was put on by small kids and you can't expect too much of them. Actually, though, they were very good. In fact, I felt like acting, too. I wonder why we never put on plays at school. I'll have to talk it over with Nikpetozh. I'd rather go to the movies than to the theater, because you don't have to think

in the movies. But as far as acting goes, I prefer the theater, because it's live, and the movies aren't.

After the play ended the little kids began to dance. I went right over to their skwork and said, "Comrade, don't you know that dancing has been prohibited?"

And she said, "In the first place, this is no concern of yours, Comrade Ryabtsev. You're driving everyone in the secondary school wild as it is, and now you want to interfere here. Secondly, if you don't like it, you can leave. And then, what are you doing here in general?"

I got real mad, but I didn't say anything and decided to talk it over with my Komsomol group. Then I watched them dance and asked Sylva if she knew how to dance. She said she did, but that she didn't like to. I noticed that her eyes were all lit up and her face was flushed, and her bow was bobbing in time to the music. I had a funny feeling that if I hadn't been there she certainly would have been dancing. I was feeling very strange. I've never felt like that before. Everything was very bright. All the lights were on, and though the music was only coming from a piano, it was so bouncy it made me want to do something unusual. Like deliver a great speech, for inst., or carry a banner at the head of a column, or at least do a somersault. However, the only person I knew there was Sylva.

She took my hand all of a sudden and said, "I don't want to stay here another minute, Vladlen. (That was our arrangement. She calls me Vladlen.) You can stay if you want to, but I'm leaving."

Naturally, I left, too. It would have been awfully boring to stay on by myself. On the way home Sylva said, "A person shouldn't yield to his whims, because if he does, what about ideology?"

That's something you can't help agreeing with.

JANUARY 5

I've noticed that I haven't been sleeping very well lately and tried to find out why. I thought it was because of all my studies, but I hardly studied at all during my vacation, even though I have a couple of November tests to take, to say nothing of my December ones. I spend a lot of time outdoors and ice skating, so I can't understand why I can't sleep. I went to see Seryozha Blinov to talk it over with him.

"Do you do a lot of reading?"

I said I did, and then he said it was because of that. On the way home from his house I tried to check on myself and discovered that I hadn't read very much during my vacation. I especially remember some parts of what I read and keep thinking about them at night.

For inst., I read a story called "The Rendezvous". It's a story about a French governess who lets a boy see her naked thigh. He runs away, because she smells sweaty, but I can't seem to forget that part. The story is in the small yellow edition of "The Universal Library". And so that's how it is. I go to school with girls and fight them, and put my hands on them, and that doesn't make any impression on me at all, but when I read something about *that* it keeps me up at night. I wonder why?

JANUARY 11

There's a list of "popular words at school" in the latest issue of "The Reel":

"Jackass, sap, dunce, rat, louse, pig, dog, devil, bitch, son-of-a-bitch, stoolie."

To say nothing of "dope" and "idiot".

There was a short note added which read: "We can't include some of the words in our newspaper, because they will even make a newspaper blush. We suggest the "XS" takes care of that.

Nikpetozh came over to us while we were reading the article. He said a wall newspaper was a very good thing for a school and then he added, "What would you say is the best way to get rid of these words?"

Somebody said there was nothing bad about them. But the others didn't agree.

Then Nikpetozh said, "It's hard to stop cursing all at once. Still, you can learn to watch your step. For instance, what if the pupils' committee prohibits the use of any word beyond 'devil', but permits the use of words up to 'devil'?"

We laughed and then agreed. I wonder what'll come of it? This wasn't an official general meeting. We were just standing around in the hall, and the decisions of such a meeting aren't binding on us.

Then Nikpetozh took some of the boys aside and we went to his lab. The girls weren't invited. Nikpetozh said, "I want to speak to you about using filthy words. The way I see it,

it's defiling your language. What would you say to coming to school covered all over with lice and manure?"

We said that was impossible.

"Well then. Using filthy language is no different. It's the same kind of filth, only it's in your minds. The schools of the past couldn't do anything about it, because the pupils were browbeaten and the only way they could protest was by using filthy language. I'd like to know what you're protesting about?"

We had nothing to say to that.

I noticed that this wasn't the first time he brought up the subject.

JANUARY 12

There's going to be a sauerkraut party! I can imagine what fun it'll be! Venya Palkin (he's in the 4th group) told me about it in secret. He made me swear I wouldn't tell a soul. I won't write anything about it yet, to be sure no one'll find out. The thing that bothers me, though, is whether it's against what the Komsomol is for.

JANUARY 13

After school today one of the girls began playing dance music on the piano. Suddenly, as if by a signal, all the girls started kicking up their feet.

I know that dancing has been prohibited, and so I spoke to a couple of the boys and we started tripping them. Naturally, they began shrieking and screeching, and the skworks came running. We had an impromptu general meeting. I like this kind of meeting best, because at a regular meeting the only thing there's a lot of is boredom and minute-taking, but at an impromptu meeting there's a lot of shouting and everyone gets excited, and the question on the agenda is always a militant one.

The first thing Big Zina wanted to know was why the boys are so dead set against dancing.

"Because it's ideologically inconsistent," Seryozha Blinov said. "There's nothing scientific or sensible about dancing. It's just rubbing against each other sexually."

Then Yelnikitka spoke up, "I think the only reason why the boys are opposed to dancing is because they don't know how to dance. There's nothing sensible or scientific about

soccer, you know. It's nothing but a lot of pushing and shoving, yet the boys are all for it."

Then we all shouted about soccer being the same as gym.

"Then dancing is gym, too," Black Zoya said.

"I can't agree to that, either," Big Zina said. "I don't think dancing can be called gym even by stretching the imagination. However, dancing is a wonderful pastime, and if it is prohibited there should be something else to take its place. The question is: what? I would suggest indoor games. I even have a book on indoor games I can give you."

Then I said, "First of all, we're not in kindergarten to play ring-around-a-rosie with the girls. And then, there's a very sensible thing for recreation which I'm sure everybody will like. I was over at the primary school and saw the little kids put on a play. It's great. Why don't we put on a play? I think that's something we should have done long ago."

"I agree," Big Zina said. "There was simply no one to take on the job. I have nothing against any of the teachers volunteering."

We crowded around Nikpetozh and he agreed, though he said he'd have to find a good play first.

We broke up after that. Venya Palkin called me aside and made me swear I wouldn't breathe a word to anyone and then told me that since today was New Year's eve according to the Church calendar, there was going to be a sauerkraut party. And he gave me the address. We're supposed to meet at 9 p. m. It's 8:30 now. I told Dad I was going to the movies and took a ruble.

JANUARY 14

I can't write anything about the sauerkraut party. If I could, I'd write an awful lot, but it's a big secret. I was very surprised to see Lina there.

JANUARY 15

We're studying as usual, but I find it much easier now, because I'm not a committee member any more. I passed all of my November tests and some of my December ones.

Nikpetozh brought a book to school today and we all went to the auditorium with him. He said, "Ryabtsev here suggested

we put on a play, and I think that was a very good suggestion. I couldn't find a suitable contemporary play, so that's why I suggest we put on one of Shakespeare's plays. I'm speaking about *Hamlet*. True, there's nothing revolutionary about it at first glance, but, and I want to stress this, it only seems that there isn't. Actually, it contains a great inner protest."

Then he began reading aloud. He reads very well, and I like to listen to him, but there was an awful lot of hogwash in the story. I shouldn't be too critical though, because it was written about 500 years ago, and Shakespeare wrote it for the queen and not for the proletariat.

Anyway, I'll write down what I said about Shakespeare's mistakes.

The story begins with some men standing watch. A ghost appears. Then Hamlet joins them, and the ghost leads him off someplace and tells him how he, I mean the ghost, was poisoned. That's when Hamlet finds out it's his father's ghost and that his father had been poisoned by his own brother, i. e. Hamlet's uncle, who then married Hamlet's mother and became the king instead of Hamlet's father. I think two things are wrong here. In the first place, there aren't any ghosts, but if one ever did appear I'd have scrambled if I were Hamlet. What was the use of talking to it? You can't fight it with any weapons if it tries to strangle you or something. In the second place, his father's ghost says he was poisoned when he was sleeping and poison was poured into his ear. I never heard of anyone being poisoned like that. Well, maybe that was what they did 500 years ago.

Shakespeare made a still bigger mistake. There's a guy called Polonius, an old man who has a daughter named Ophelia and a son named Laertes. Hamlet pals around with Ophelia and seems to be sweet on her, though that's not too clear. Laertes lives in France, and his old man's worried about him running wild there. Then they all notice that something's bothering Hamlet and they think it's because he's in love with Ophelia. Actually, he's worried because of the ghost and even pretends he's crazy. He does it on purpose, because he wants to find out whether the ghost was lying or not. I mean, about being poisoned. So the supposedly crazy Hamlet has a play put on in which the actors show the audience how his father, the king, was poisoned. The new king, i. e. Hamlet's uncle, goes to see the play together with Hamlet's mother. This is where there's a big mistake. I don't think that in those days anybody who was crazy would be allowed to put on a play.

They'd just lock him away in an insane asylum. Well, any way, the king and the queen sit back to watch the crazy play and when they see what it's all about they scam. Hamlet really puts on a crazy act. First of all, he sits down on the floor instead of taking a chair. Then he keeps interrupting the play to say all kinds of crazy things. And then he jumps up and says:

Why, let the stricken deer go weep....

The king gets very mad, and that's just what Hamlet's been waiting for. Now he knows for sure that the king poisoned his father. Hamlet has a good head on his shoulders even though he comes from a bourgeois family. The Hamlet's mother, the queen, talks to him and sort of asks him to forgive her. But that old geezer Polonius is hiding behind the curtain, eavesdropping. Hamlet notices him and runs his sword through him, just as if he were sticking a pig. That's what makes his girl, Ophelia, really go mad. The old man's son, Laertes, comes back from France and wants to knock Hamlet off, because he did in his daddy. That's why Laertes poisons his rapier and challenges Hamlet to a duel. That's what they used to call a fight between two men. To make sure that Hamlet's really bumped off, the king puts some poison in a cup of wine. But something goes wrong and Hamlet knocks Laertes off, and the queen gets the cup of poison, and then Hamlet runs his sword through the king and dies himself. There's a scene before this in which Hamlet talks to a couple of skulls, but I think that's really stupid. Who'd ever talk to a skull except someone who was really loony? But Hamlet wasn't crazy, he was just pretending.

Most of the kids voted in favor of putting on the play. I abstained, because I think it would be much more interesting to put on something more contemporary. Something that has barricades and a revolutionary struggle in it.

Black Zoya was present at the reading but she kept quiet. I don't know why Lina wasn't there.

JANUARY 16

I still haven't said a word about the sauerkraut party to anyone. It's a deep, dark secret. Venya Palkin said that everybody who was there is keeping his mouth shut. That's very important.

I keep wondering, though, whether this is in keeping with the ideology of the Komsomol and of the communist struggle in general. I don't know why, but I don't trust Sylva in things like this. Besides, Venya Palkin says I shouldn't let her in on it. Venya says she's not that kind of a girl. But I have nobody else to talk it over with. Venya Palkin isn't a member of the Komsomol. If I ask any of the old Komsomol members I might ruin everything. I really don't know what to do.

JANUARY 17

Today was the final end of our campaign against Dalton. An inspector from the Board of Education came to school and a general meeting was called. The question on the agenda was our school life and the Dalton Plan. It was awfully boring, and I spent most of the meeting doing a poster. Big Zina spoke about the time we set fire to the straw dummy of Lord Dalton. I don't think she should have, because we were just fooling around then and she went and tattled to the inspector about it. He laughed and said,

"You had a quiet life here and didn't have to call for outside help, but then suddenly the teachers and the pupils were unable to see eye to eye. You're all to blame. I feel like a surgeon who's been called in to perform an operation. I hope that in the future you'll be able to do without a surgeon. Boys and girls, I'd like to know what you think the Dalton Plan's shortcomings are and how you propose to overcome them!" Everybody started criticizing Lord Dalton. We told the inspector that the labs were bare and that we had no free time, especially those of us who had extra duties, and many other things. Then I got up and said,

"The labs aren't what's most important. What is it that my head's splitting and my hands jerk, and all on account of Dalton."

Everybody began to laugh.

"What are you laughing about? Did you ever have to stay up nights, especially when you were a committee member? It's no laughing matter. Everybody else is just as badly off. Besides, everybody's doing worse in school. There was never anyone in our group who lagged behind before, but now there is."

"Who is that?" Big Zina wanted to know.

"Me."

Everybody laughed again.

"There's nothing to laugh about." I was really mad. "Dalton's been hanging over me like a sword. No matter what I do, I keep remembering that I still have a pile of tests to take. I didn't take my math test or my science test, and I didn't do the diagrams. I have no place to study and no time to, either. There's no time to read. There's no time to go ice skating."

"I happened to see you out ice skating very often during this past vacation, Ryabtsev," Yelnikitka piped up.

"Did you want me to stay indoors all the time?"

Then the inspector said, "Why don't you take your tests on time, Ryabtsev?"

"I don't have time to. Besides, I was a member of the pupils' committee."

Then the inspector turned to Big Zina and said, "Are the others also behind in their studies?"

"No, most of the pupils are keeping up with their work."

That took care of me, but good. The Dalton Plan stayed put. Dalton still would have won out, even if most of the kids were behind in their studies. My school is still the kind of place where the skworks decide everything and the pupils are like the serfs Nikpetozh told us about: they weren't free until they'd worked off their corvée. The inspector and every other kind of official are always on the side of the skworks. I don't think other schools are run this way. What really gets me mad, though, is the fact that they treat us like babies, even though we're in secondary school.

In closing, Big Zina said, "Our school has now returned to normal. We will study, study and study! Do you remember who said that?"

"Lenin! Lenin!" everybody shouted.

That was the end of the meeting.

JANUARY 18

Today was the casting day. Seryozha Blinov is going to be Hamlet, though I'm sure I'm just as good an actor as he is.

I have to play Laertes, and even though there's a lot of fencing, it's not the same. What the hell, I'll be Laertes! It's better than nothing. Today I tried to fence and die naturally. I think I did rather well. Especially this part:

*...lo, here I lie,
Never to rise again....*

And this part:

...thy mother's poison'd:

I can no more: the king, the king's to blame.

You have to say the last "king" in a whisper, as if you're prompting somebody in class.

The girls are worse off because, actually, the only two female roles in the play, not counting the ladies-in-waiting, are the queen and Ophelia. Naturally, every girl wanted to be Ophelia, which made 32 in all from all the groups. Nikpetozh had a tryout to see how they'd read aloud, walk and carry themselves on stage. It took him a long time to decide who's going to be Ophelia. He finally put it off till tomorrow.

As soon as he left the auditorium all the girls began shouting. It was enough to make you die laughing. One screamed, "You were terrible!" Another shouted, "You're much too short!" The third shouted, "If I don't have a role I won't take part in it at all." They were all shouting at once, so you couldn't make anything out. When I told them to draw lots they nearly murdered me. I barely managed to escape.

Lina wasn't at the tryout and she was absent from school. Black Zoya just watched all the other girls. She usually keeps mum after the day she and Lina tried to commit suicide and then got scared. Sylva didn't come to the tryout, because she says she doesn't have any talent for acting. I tried to talk her into it, but it was no use. She said she tried and nothing came of it.

JANUARY 19

Even though Venya Palkin's father is a vendor at the Sukharev Market, he's the best pupil in the 4th group. The skworks say he's very bright. That's right, too. I asked him to help me with some problems a couple of times and to explain something about history, and he always helped me out. I think he's got a good imagination. He started telling me all about America last year and then said he'd been there himself. I didn't believe a word of it, because you have to know how to speak American to live there, and Venya said he didn't. But I pretended I did, and then he swore me to secrecy and said he was planning to go to America again and that maybe he'd take me along. That's a lot of hogwash, but I pretended I believed him. He didn't lie to me about the sauerkraut party, though. I can't help thinking that they're against our ideology.

We rehearsed *Hamlet* today. The latest issue of "The Reel" was tacked up on the wall this afternoon. It featured a cartoon of Seryozha Blinov shaking his fists at some kids running towards him. The dialogue read:

"What happened? Was somebody murdered?"

"What's all the shouting about?"

"They're rehearsing *Hamlet*."

There really was a lot of shouting. Seryozha has a gruff voice and he kept bellowing. Black Zoya tried out for the part of Ophelia and Nikpetozh said she wasn't too bad. I agree, though I think it might have been done better. I've been practicing wielding a rapier (that is, a stick), and I wanted everyone to see, but I didn't have a chance to show them, because we haven't got as far as the last act yet.

JANUARY 22

I feel as if the world has ended and there's a black cloud over everything. It's 3 a.m. now. I'm sitting at my desk and my thoughts are all jumbled. At first, I thought I was putting on an act, but I'm not. It's for real. School and everything about it seem so insignificant and stupid, just as if we're all tiny bugs, the kind you can only see through a microscope.

The window panes are covered with curly designs made by the frost. I think they look like the carving on coffins. I can still hear the sad music and see the black bunting.

All my thoughts keep slipping away, and I can't concentrate.

The following three pages of the diary have been inked out

JANUARY 30

I crossed all that out. I wanted to write a poem and describe everything I saw, but it didn't come out the way I wanted it to. It calls for different words, not the ones I know. I know that I feel about ten years older than I did a couple of days ago, and the words I might have written then as a boy won't do now.

JANUARY 31

School hasn't returned to normal yet.

The death of V. I. Lenin was such a shock that the usual routine of studies and games has been disrupted.

The skworks don't mention our tests any more. Everybody knows we have to study, but we can't seem to get back into the swing of things. Nikpetozh has been reading aloud to us a lot these past days. The girls cry a lot.

Black Zoya is going to be Ophelia, and that's final. We had a rehearsal today, but it all went wrong. Nobody had any spunk. Nobody's heart was in it.

Big Zina says that our main task now is to study well, and that we must do our best to overcome every obstacle.

She's right about that.

THE FIFTH NOTEBOOK

February

FEBRUARY 3

"The Reel" polled the first three groups. The question asked was:

"What is the purpose of life?"

Everyone is very serious these days, and that's why there were so many replies. I copied out the most interesting ones (written by secondary school pupils):

Group 1A

1) We should live to study and learn about things that are still unknown. (That's a lot of hogwash! — Vladlen Ryabtsev.)

2) We live to study, rejoice, suffer, and help our neighbors. We live for a lot of other things, too!

Group 1B

1) We live and study in order to build a strong and cultured nation and help our neighbors. We should know that the sea was formed drop by drop, and every person is a drop that lives, works and accomplishes various great, small, and middling deeds. If this drop does nothing, it should know that it is in the sea's way. There's no room for it in the sea, and it must leave. So let's try to learn more so that we can defend Soviet Russia against the accursed bourgeoisie.

2) We live to enjoy life. We study in order to be happy when we relax after our labors. We feel pleasure when reading a

good book or listening to an interesting story. We also feel pleasure after passing a test.

3) I live in order to study and become educated in the future. I don't want to be uneducated, because then everyone will oppress me.

Group 2

1) To study, be of use to the nation and also to myself, in part. If I will not be of any use to myself, I will die without having lived, and that means one should live usefully.

2) I think a person should live in order to live.

3) A poor man lives and toils and wastes all his time in order to make ends meet; a bourgeois also lives in order to have a good life (naturally, I mean an unconscientious one). A person who has some social responsibilities also toils to make life better; even though he often perishes, he helps others to live better. Therefore, I think that people live in order to make life better, if not for themselves, then for others. And the reason we're studying now is also to make our own life better or improve the lives of others. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, our recently departed teacher, is an example to us.

4) We should live in order to satisfy our demands. (I'd like to know who wrote that, but the editorial board of "The Reel" won't say. This kind of a reply proves a complete lack of social consciousness. It wasn't written by a person, it was written by an animal. — Vladlen Ryabtsev.)

5) The purpose of life lies in creating a guaranteed future for the coming generations.

6) We should live in order to defend the gains of the proletariat — by arms, if necessary.

7) They usually say that the meaning of life is to create a new culture for the future generation, but this doesn't satisfy me at all. I think that the purpose of life is to live it calmly and happily, with just a few small worries. (How'd we get so many bourgeois in school? — Vladlen Ryabtsev.)

Group 3 (My group)

1) Naturally, we should not just watch others struggle and win, but should struggle and triumph ourselves.

2) We should not have to be responsible to anyone, but should come to understand everything ourselves. (Not bad! — Vladlen Ryabtsev.)

3) The editor of "The Reel" who posed this question probably wanted to delve into the wilds of philosophy, or else he was simply overcome by terrible fear and trepidation in the face of the insignificance of human life. In the first case this is good, and in the second, it is bad. And this is why. "A person should live in order to live" is the only possible answer to this question, no matter how strange or lop-sided it seems. The purpose and meaning of life lie only in life itself, in its process. One must love life and be immersed in it completely in order to understand the goal and meaning of it. Then only will one understand the meaning of life and the goals one should set oneself. Life is a thing that doesn't call for theory, unlike everything else that was created by man: when you acquire some experience in life its theory becomes clear.

This is especially felt in our present, turbulent life, when one can always participate in social undertakings and politics, when one can choose a field to one's liking and go on and on, rejoicing because one lives in a time of life, revitalized theory.

In former times, when teaching was dull and life was uninteresting, pupils were bored stiff. Their thoughts centered on the uselessness of human life, and sometimes they went as far as losing not only their taste but their desire for life as well and committed suicide. The notes they left behind read: "What's the use of living?"

We observe this in various pre-revolutionary novels and stories. Read Chekhov's "A Dull Story" or L. Andreyev's "A Man's Life". They will make you chuckle, and you'll say: Were there really such types and authors, people who had no contact with real life and did not understand it? Yes, there were, but they didn't live, they spent their time thinking. They wanted to find life in theory but could not. In time these people became bitterly disappointed; they belonged to our poor, perished intelligentsia. That is why, if this question, "What is the purpose of life?" sounds pessimistic, it is completely out of place in our present active life. It is all a part of the past. However, as a sensible, natural question, it should not be brushed aside. I don't refer you, for instance, to Lev Tolstoy's views. He said that one should not think about the purpose of human life, because man is like a harnessed horse that will never know why its master whips it on. On the contrary, one should have faith in the unlimited possibilities of the human mind. But then again, if we look at it from a theoret-

ical point of view, we will realize the necessity of accepting the realities of life: in order to achieve mental progress one must apply oneself to various fields of study, and this means taking an active part in life.

He who does not agree, who seeks reality within himself, who believes only in the possibilities of the human soul while disdaining active life, or simply sulks from a realization of his own insignificance, is a person whom life has no use for. The soul of such a person becomes shallow, since it can only be deep if it is in harmony with life; such a person can relieve his existence by, as one of Dostoyevsky's characters said, "humbly returning God his ticket for entering life".

(I think a skwork wrote this. — V. Ryabtsev.)

FEBRUARY 5

I went to the sauerkraut party yesterday. Despite everything, I didn't enjoy it. I kept thinking about the purpose of life. I saw Lina there and asked her why she was staying out of school, and she said, "It's none of your business." I called her a stupid fool.

FEBRUARY 6

We rehearsed *Hamlet* today. Everything went smoothly. I still get a kick out of it when I think of it. Seryozha Blinov growled, he bellowed like a bull and raced about the stage in a lather. He acted like a really crazy man. Then he thought up the following: in the scene where he talks to the grave-digger he doesn't throw the skull into the grave, but flings it at the grave-digger instead to prove how crazy he really is. It looks swell. Then, when Seryozha and I fenced, I knocked his rapier out of his hand, although he was supposed to knock my rapier out of my hand. And then Nikpetozh said that this was a play and we had to act according to the way Shakespeare'd written it. Why didn't Seryozha learn to fence then?

I don't know how Black Zoya managed to change into something else for each act. She says that's how she'll do it at the performance and keeps changing now so she'll get used to it. After she goes mad and appears singing mad songs, she strung paper flowers all over herself, unbraided and tangled her hair, rolled up her eyes and sang very softly. It made me

feel creepy. She looked much prettier than she always does. I never knew that changing a dress could make such a difference.

The queen has ten ladies-in-waiting, and since the stage is so small and the ladies-in-waiting are onstage so much, they kept shoving each other and squabbling, so that we had to interrupt the rehearsal a couple of times.

FEBRUARY 8

Last week I borrowed *The Schoolboys* from Nikpetozh. He had read aloud to us from it about Kartashov and Korneva. I was amazed by one of the passages, I mean the time Kartashov is coming home and sees the maid Tanya's naked white thigh and.... Just thinking about it keeps me up at night. It's very annoying. My head feels fuzzy and I can't concentrate on my studies.

FEBRUARY 10

The latest issue of "X" came out with an article about "The Reel" and its poll on the purpose of life. Here's the article:

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE IN OUR SCHOOL

"The Reel" recently took up philosophy and decided to determine the purpose of life in general. As we have already mentioned on several occasions, "X" has set itself the goal of utilizing everything it can for the good of our school. That's why it's taking this opportunity to talk about the purpose of life in our school. To this end, we'll use the method of induction, i.e. proceeding from the particular to the general. To be brief, we'll examine the quintessence of all the school trends, namely, their slogans.

1) Discover what has not yet been discovered. For example: discover a perpetual motion.

2) Learning is light, ignorance is darkness!

3) Hooray for dancing!

4) Hooray for a quiet life with small worries!

5) Satisfy your needs! In particular, don't forget to blow your nose and go to the....

6) Studying too much at our age is detrimental to our health. Hooray for free time to spend as we wish!

And, going from the particular to the general, we exclaim:
"Hit him! I know him, he lives on my street!"

I think it's all very stupid and not even funny. The purpose of life is a very serious thing. If you have a goal in life, you know how to act accordingly. And it's awfully hard to live when you don't know what to do in a given situation.

FEBRUARY 11

Yesterday I saw my dear friend Vanya Petukhov. He works at the factory now and makes good money, and supports his family. He tried to talk me into getting a job there, but I said I had to graduate first. I spoke to him about the purpose and meaning of life. His opinion is simple enough:

"We're living in order to build a new, bright and happy system, communism, on the site of the old, decayed system."

That's what I used to think myself, but "The Reel's" poll has made me rather confused.

Then we talked about sex. This is what he said,

"That's no problem at the factory. If a fellow likes a girl he goes straight up to her and says, 'I like you, Manya, or Lena. Do you want to be my girl?' If she doesn't, she turns her back on him, and if she wants to, then she's his girl."

"You mean all the way?"

"Sure. Just like a husband and wife. You need sex just like you need food. You can't live without food, and you can't live without sex, either."

"What if she has a baby?"

"Who thinks about that, stupid?"

"You, too, Vanya?"

"Sure."

I think he's lying, at least about himself.

FEBRUARY 12

We're rehearsing like mad. Seryozha Blinov's hoarse, but that just makes it more spooky. He keeps on thinking up new tricks. For instance, today, in the place where the king gets up to leave the play, Hamlet says,

Why, let the stricken deer go weep....

Seryozha shouted the line and then rushed after the king and tried to strangle him. I thought he really did go mad. Nikpe-tozh ran onstage and grabbed hold of Seryozha.

"What's the matter?"

"I want the king to believe I'm crazy!"

"That's not in the play!"

"So what? It's the producer's privilege of invention."

"In the first place, I'm the producer, not you, and only one person should be giving directions. Besides, if we follow your way of thinking, Hamlet should batter his head against the wall and set the place on fire."

"The producer should give the actors a free rein," Seryozha said. "Otherwise, we'll just be puppets, dolls on strings, not actors."

"I have been giving you a free rein, but I don't want you to strangle anyone."

"Trust the skworks to put you down every time," Seryozha muttered.

The way I see it, a producer should let the actors act the way they want to. For instance, I play Laertes and Hamlet knocks my rapier out of my hand. The way I would do it would be: first, I would knock Hamlet's rapier out of his hand and then I'd graciously let him pick it up, and then he'd knock my rapier out of my hand.

FEBRUARY 13

When I got home from school today Dad looked very upset. I asked him what was wrong. He didn't say a word. He just gave me a piece of paper, and I could see his hands were shaking. This is what it said:

"You should pay more attention to what your son is doing. His behavior has taken a sharp plunge lately. He goes to parties where he drinks hard liquor and gets plastered. Besides, he smokes strong tobacco. However, he's been keeping all this a secret so that you'll never find out. He joined a social club and paid his membership fee. The club is of a very dubious nature and very degenerate. On Saturday the members will meet in Ivanovsky Park to spend the night in wild drinking and revelling. That's why your son won't spend the night at home this Saturday. He'll probably think of a good excuse for

your sake. This letter may seem silly to you, or even impossible to believe, but you can find a way to check on the truth of it. Kostya has learned to trick you very well, and only you can have any influence on him."

I sank down on a chair in stunned silence.

"Is any of this true, Kostya?"

"No, it's not, Dad." I couldn't catch my breath. "If there was any truth in this you'd have noticed it long ago. Did you ever smell liquor on my breath? Tell me? Did you?"

"No, I don't remember.... But then I never sniffed around you."

"But don't you have eyes? Couldn't you see I was never drunk? After all, you see me every day."

"Yes. I know, but...."

He didn't believe me. How could I convince him?

"When do I have time to drink? You know very well that we have meetings practically every single day, and I'm all in when I get home. And the minute I do, I sit down to study, so that I never have any free time at all. As far as smoking goes, that's the truth, I didn't want to tell you, so's not to upset you. But about my drinking, that's a pack of lies."

Meanwhile, I was thinking, "What rat wrote that? It's printed in block letters and there's no signature, to make sure I'd never recognize the handwriting. Could it be...?"

It was beyond me. Dad was pacing up and down. His hands were trembling. I was so sorry for him I didn't know what to do. I went over and put my arm around him.

"Please believe me, Dad. It's all a pack of lies. I've never lied to you. Why should I now? Stop worrying, have supper, and go to bed. Tomorrow, if you want to, you can go to school and ask our principal if I'm like that or not. All right?"

He looked me in the eye and said he had no intention of going to school, because he believed me. But I couldn't calm down. I'll find out who did it if it's the last thing I do.

I still can't fall asleep. I've seen how hard it is to lie to a fine old man like Dad.

FEBRUARY 14

Well! A lot of other parents got the same kind of letter Dad did yesterday. Six of them came to school today and crowded around Big Zina. She called all their kids in and had a long talk with them, and when they came out of her

office they were as red as beets. I tried but couldn't find out anything. Venya Palkin is pale and sulky. He isn't talking to anybody. He thinks somebody found out about the sauerkraut parties and is afraid it'll get him in trouble. I don't think there's anything to be afraid of now. If they do find out, he should confess, but he should try to keep anyone from finding out.

FEBRUARY 16

Lina's back in school again. Everybody thinks she was sick. Her eyes were all red from crying. She said her father got one of the letters. She kept crying all day.

Finally, I got fed up and went over to her and said, "You'll give us all away if you keep on crying! Nobody really knows anything about it, and we can keep it a secret."

That only made her cry worse. She looked awfully mad at me and sobbed, "It's all your fault! You're the only one to blame. If not for you, I'd...." And she really began to bawl. But what have I got to do with it? I don't know what she means. Why should I be to blame? They said she wanted to commit suicide on account of me, but that's a lie. And even if it isn't, it's not my fault she has a crush on me. As far as the sauerkraut parties go, I'm as much to blame as she is. All I did is attend them.

FEBRUARY 17

Big Zina asked the pupils' committee to call a general meeting today. The question on the agenda was the anonymous letters.

"I would like anyone who knows anything about the origin of these letters to tell the meeting what he knows and also whether there's any truth in them at all. You can all see how depressed many of the boys and girls are. They're even unable to study."

No one said a word. I was terribly upset. On the one hand, I was bound by my pledge to secrecy, just like all the others. On the other, I could see that things had to be resolved somehow.

"Well, I see that no one knows anything about it," Big Zina said. "I suggest, therefore, that we let the matter rest. I'm convinced that the person who wrote all this let his

imagination run away with him. I, for one, would be extremely obliged to him if he channelled it in some other direction instead of disrupting our studies. Besides, I think everything possible should be done to hurry up the production of *Hamlet*. You should hold rehearsals every day. The play can do a lot towards ventilating everyone's brains and clearing the air, for the atmosphere has become very oppressive."

Most of the kids laughed, but I felt still worse. I felt as ashamed as the time I lied to Dad. Big Zina really trusts us. She's always ready to stick up for us. And we lied to her.

The play will be presented on February 20 (with Nikpetozh's consent) and the Komsomol group of the factory we're affiliated with will be invited.

FEBRUARY 18

I have to find some solution to this matter of sex, because it's wearing me out. It's gotten so bad that during the rehearsal today, when all the girls had their costumes on and fancy hairdos, and it was awfully crowded onstage, I started pressing them into the corner, but not because of horsing around, but because of something else. The girls protested and Nikpetozh said he'd give my part to someone else, even though the play might suffer. It's a good thing Nikpetozh and the others didn't notice it wasn't just horsing around. They were all saying I'd been on my good behavior, but that now I was back to my old tricks again.

What if they really knew?

FEBRUARY 19

After what happened I don't think I'll ever be able to speak to Sylva again. I don't even know how to write about it. We were always just good pals. Actually, I don't feel anything more than that towards her even now, but a devil seemed to get into me, and that's why everything happened.

Sylva's the head of the Costumes Committee, because none of the other members does anything and she had to make practically all of the costumes by herself. That's why she attended all the rehearsals and why she was at the dress rehearsal today. The actors' dressing room is in the science lab. Sylva was sewing up Laertes' costume (on me) and I said, "Would you go out with me? I'm asking this as a matter of principle."

"What do you mean? We see a lot of each other all the time, don't we?"

"That's not what I mean. I mean really."

She stopped sewing. "Don't we really go out?"

"You don't understand." I was beginning to feel uneasy. "I mean, well, like a husband and wife."

I thought she'd get mad, but she didn't. She lowered her eyes and said, "You mean you want to marry me? You're too young to get married, and I know I certainly am."

"You don't understand," I said, but I was actually trying to find some way to escape. "That's not what I meant. I'm not talking about marriage. I wanted to say ... uh, could you be my girl? I mean now, while we're still at school?"

She looked up at me and said, "How would that be?"

"Well ... uh, for instance, I might kiss you."

She thought it over and said, "No, I don't think I'd let you. But say I do. Then what?"

"Oh, go to hell!" I shouted, broke the thread she was sewing with and dashed out.

I couldn't look her in the eye all during rehearsal.

FEBRUARY 22

I still haven't written anything about the première, because I was busy investigating the letters.

The performance was a great success. Seryozha Blinov roared like a lion and skitted back and forth across the stage, knocking everyone over, so that the king had to say, "Take it easy, you jackass!" The Ghost, played by Venya Palkin, was a real success. He was swathed in a sheet and his face was covered with chalk dust. He had a very spooky voice, especially when he spoke through a megaphone from under the stage. He was supposed to appear from the trap-door, but it got stuck and he had to appear from the wings. Nikpetozh was more worried than anyone else. He sat in the wings with the book open on his lap and prompted us like a real prompter. The kids in the front rows told us they could hear two versions: one coming from the wings and the other from the stage. I ended up knocking Seryozha's rapier out of his hand, because he doesn't know how to fence, but nobody noticed it wasn't according to Shakespeare.

Black Zoya played her part very well. In fact, she was better than anybody else. They say many of the girls wept just to watch her.

FEBRUARY 25

Black Zoya surprised me today. She's become very stuck-up after the première, because she had so many curtain calls. In general, she's different now. She stopped wearing that awful black dress and looks cheerful. She's not at all like she used to be. And she doesn't want to talk about dead people any more, though some of the kids still tease her. Anyway, she called me out into the hall and said, "I want to tell you a secret."

"What secret? I'm not interested in any secrets."

"It's very important. You know, I have a crush on you."

"What?"

"Just what I said. And don't put on airs on account of that, because a person can't do anything about falling in love. It's bigger than he is. And don't think I'll do anything silly on account of you. I've been thinking about it a lot and decided to tell you to your face, because it'll ease my heart. But it doesn't give you any rights as far as I'm concerned."

"Go take a drink of cold water," I said and walked off.

FEBRUARY 26

It's really very strange. The girls went off to whisper in a huddle and somebody told me that they want to raise a stink about the sauerkraut parties again. But the most important thing I've found out is that Sylva is on their side. I haven't spoken to her since the day I asked her that question (I only wanted to find out as a matter of principle), and I think she's trying to avoid me.

As soon as I discovered what the girls were whispering about I talked it over with Venya Palkin and we decided to launch a counter-offensive.

FEBRUARY 27

I'm very happy and pleased with myself. I spent most of February writing my report on the events in China, and Nikpetozh praised it highly.

Then, I think I've found out who wrote the anonymous letters. It's Kesha Gorokhov, a tall, lanky kid who never talks much.

He's in the 2nd group. The only clue I had was the letter Dad got.

Everybody brings his own ink to school, so I started investigating the kind of ink everybody has. It was a hard job, because all the kids put their ink away as soon as they've written whatever they have to write, which means it's hard to check. But a trick did it today. I rushed into the math lab when the 2nd group was there and Almakfish wasn't, and shouted, "Give me some ink! Hurry! Almakfish needs it!"

Then I grabbed a bottle (naturally, I got Kesha's. I knew his seat was by the door) and raced out again.

He shouted, "Wait! I'm not through writing yet!"

But I'm no fool. I dashed off to the auditorium where I had an empty bottle ready and poured some of his ink off into it. Then I sauntered back to the math lab and returned Kesha's bottle. He looked at me suspiciously but didn't say a word. I've been watching him for some time, and I've noticed that he gets flustered whenever I look at him. Then again, he's the only kid in the 2nd group who was at the sauerkraut parties. I compared the two inks and they match. Now all I have to do is check the handwriting and I'll know for sure. That's going to be a very hard job, because all the letters were written in block characters.

THE SIXTH NOTEBOOK

March

MARCH 3

It took a lot of cunning to get one of Kesha Gorokhov's notebooks so that I could compare the handwriting. I finally decided there was very much that was similar, so I went to have it out with Kesha. I got right down to business.

"Did you write those letters to our parents, Kesha?"

He looked terrified and said, "Are you crazy?"

"Don't worry, I know all about you."

"What do you know? What do you know?" He got his mitts up.

I tried to look mysterious and walked off. Now, according to the laws of psychology, he's supposed to seek me out and confess.

MARCH 4

I really got into a mess. This is what happened. I went to take my January history test and when I opened my history book I found a note in it. It read:

"For old time's sake, Kostya, this is to warn you that they're starting a campaign against you and Venya Palkin on account of the sauerkraut parties. They know all about it. Beware."

The reason I gasped when I read it was not because of the message, but because the handwriting and the block letters and the ink all matched. That meant it wasn't Kesha. After our run-in he wouldn't have bothered to warn me about any trouble coming my way, and especially not "for old time's sake". So I

went to Nikpetozh and instead of taking the test I said, "Do you think I'm right in trying to find out which of the kids wrote the anonymous letters?"

"How are you going about it?"

"I keep my eyes open and then I draw conclusions."

"Why did you decide to do it?"

"Because whoever wrote them was getting his comrades into a lot of trouble."

"Well, Ryabtsev, first of all, I'd say that spying on your comrades is not a very nice thing to do. Besides, the matter has been forgotten, so why stir it up again?"

I nearly told him that it was surfacing again, but I shut my mouth just in time.

I guess I'll stop my investigation, because I nearly made a fool of myself by suspecting Kesha Gorokhov.

I wonder who wrote the letters and the note to me?

MARCH 7

I read *Sanin* by Artsybashev and then couldn't sleep all night again. My head's splitting, and I really don't know what to do. Maybe I should go to Nikpetozh? But I feel funny about talking to him. He'll say, "Wasn't all this explained to you in biology? Wasn't that enough?" And anyway, I can't tell him *everything*.

The worst thing about it is that all this has a bad effect on my mental capacity. Things have gotten so far that I dug out the notebook where I'd copied out the purpose of life article from the wall newspaper and found the place where I'd written "this is all a lot of hogwash" (that was about satisfying one's needs) and crossed out what I'd written. Naturally, if a person is forced to satisfy his needs in a different way than everybody else it causes suffering. He also suffers when he can't satisfy his needs at all. And what's the use of living if all you do is suffer?

But when I started thinking such thoughts I immediately asked myself, "Is this worthy of a Komsomol member, of a person who's in the vanguard of youth? Because while I'm not a full-fledged Komsomol member yet, I consider myself a convinced communist. Actually, I think that I've done a lot of bad things. For instance: taking part in the sauerkraut parties and lying afterwards and, mainly, of course, the question of sex. The bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia solved the problem of sex the

way I do. Does that make me a bourgeois? Or an intellectual? I don't consider myself to be either, and that's why I have to find some other way out.

MARCH 12

I've just come home from a Komsomol meeting at the factory club. It's very late now, but I want to write everything down, otherwise I might leave something out. There were about 150 people there, but only about 20 kids from my school. The rest were all from the factory. At first, everything was just like it usually is at our meetings. Maybe even more boring. There was a report from the district committee, and then a report from the Bureau. The factory Komsomol members were so bored they started fooling around, and the chairman had to keep calling them to order. Then they got onto current affairs and everyone pricked up their ears.

One of the factory girls whose last name is Gulkina handed in an application for a subsidy to have an abortion. (I'll have to ask Seryozha Blinov about it. I think it's some sort of an operation to turn a man into a woman or a woman into a man. It's a new scientific discovery. They do something so that a woman can't have children). Anyway, after they read the application there was so much noise you couldn't hear anything. Some of the members said she should be given a subsidy and some said she shouldn't. Then Ivanov, a very serious fellow and the Secretary of the Komsomol group, took the floor.

"Where the hell are we supposed to get any funds if membership dues are three months' in arrears? What do you expect us to do, collect dues by force? Where'll we get the money for her? What do you think this is, a bank?"

Then one of the girls spoke up. She looked very angry. She had been giving us her opinions after every report and had been just as angry each time.

"Does that mean we have to give every girl who asks for it money for an abortion? What'll that lead to? That means everybody will start having abortions. And who's going to have children? The Queen of Sheeba? Here's what I suggest. I say, give her a book about abortions and let her read it."

But then some of the others started shouting again, "Give her the money!"

I think they were just shouting to make noise, because the Secretary made it all as plain as day: there are no funds.

Then another girl spoke up, "We shouldn't give her money for anything. First of all, because there aren't any funds. Secondly, as the previous speaker said, somebody has to have children. And, thirdly, and this is most important, she might die from the abortion. Or else it might get her into a lot of trouble. She might be crippled for life. After all, not every abortion is successful."

Then some more people shouted about not giving her any money.

Finally, Ivanov took the floor again and said, "As I've already said, we can't give her any money from our treasury. But we can't adopt a decision that'll simply refuse her the subsidy. Don't you remember the other application we received from her? She said she had no place to live and asked for a room or a room to share. We have to look into the situation, especially since she lives someplace way out. Naturally, an abortion is no solution. She should have her baby. But we can't brush her off. We've got to help her! Should we find her a room, or what?"

It was put to a vote. A commission was elected to look into the matter and then everybody sang "The Young Guard". That meant the meeting was over.

I walked home by myself and kept thinking about what had happened. Life at the factory and the work of the factory Kom-somol group, had seemed very special to me before, like a factory all lit up at night with lights blazing in every window. Actually, though, the young workers there fool around just like we do and it's not too hard to understand what the questions on the agenda are all about. I thought it would take a long time before I'd understand what was going on, but I was mistaken.

That made me feel better. First of all, I'm not alone and, secondly, it means I can be of use to my class. At the same time, I started thinking about sex again, but from a different angle. Everything I heard today made me look at things differently. Vanya Petukhov said that it was all very simple, but I see that it isn't, not if a group with a membership of 150 couldn't figure out what to do. I think sex can cause a lot of suffering, like that abortion. Why should a girl be crippled for life?

I should have spent more time working with the factory group, because there's an awful lot I can learn there. I'm definitely going to see Ivanov and ask him about a certain matter.

MARCH 14

I spoke to Seryozha Blinov about abortions and he explained it all in detail. Then he gave me a story that was in the paper and I decided to include it here.

TRIAL BY FIRE

(An episode from the life of Manya Guzikova)

1

As always, the red star was shining its welcome over the clubroom door, gleaming in the velvety air of the summer evening. As always, a crowd of young people was trying to push its way into the club, while the boys on duty at the door were holding back the attack. The door would swing open, slam and swing open again, and snatches of shouted conversations would burst upon the blue air of the side street.

Manya Guzikova elbowed someone away, jostled someone else and ducked, and just then someone behind her grabbed hold of her. It was Vasya. He pushed the door open and said,

"Go on in, Manya."

Manya darted in under his arm and was immediately engulfed by a cloud of acrid tobacco smoke, bright lights, noise and cursing. Nothing in the club had changed, but Manya had. She felt she was foul and filthy. She felt she had defiled herself and the club. She had been feeling sick to her stomach for the last two days, hankering for herring and dill pickles. She gave her apprentice's salary of twenty-six rubles and thirty kopecks to her mother, who was not one for fancy cooking. They had cabbage soup and potatoes for dinner every single day of the week.

The girls ran over to her. All of them had on red kerchiefs. They spun her around, and she had a hard time breaking away. Then she went on to the common room. Something seemed to explode inside her head, making the room turn dark. She was dizzy. She was so terribly nauseous that she sank down to the floor, sitting back on her own cold legs. Jailbird Volodya was there, laughing his head off and fooling around with the fellows.

They grabbed hold of Manya, dragged her over to a bench and pressed the cold rim of a mug of water to her mouth. Manya shuddered, opened her eyes and then closed them again. The boys stood over her in a tight circle. The girls whispered. And

all of them stared at her. "They all know," she said to herself. "And that dog Volodya's laughing." Snatches of conversation reached her ears:

"Let's call the district nurse."

"She'll come to."

"She sure is nervous."

"Shut up! Can't you see she's sick?"

"What's wrong with her?"

"She had too much to eat over the holidays."

And then two more words, but these were the most frightening of all: "Tell Mug."

Manya jumped up. She wanted to say, "No, don't! I'm all right." However, the floor slipped away from under her and she collapsed onto the bench. She didn't know how many minutes had elapsed or what else had been said when the voice of the terrible Mug sounded like a steel hammer,

"Move, everybody. Give her some air. She's not feeling well."

Manya had not expected this. She knew that everyone had deserted her and that she could not expect any help. She knew that Mug would berate her and, since everyone knew, would kick her out of the club. But he had suddenly said, "She's not feeling well." This was much worse. Manya tensed. The wave of nausea passed. She did not feel dizzy any more, just a bit weak. She opened her eyes a crack, as if she were ill, so that he would not chase her out. After all, Mug would take pity on her and let her catch her breath. But he said, "Can you get up?"

She jumped up like she used to in school when her strict teacher called on her and mumbled, "I'll go. I'll go by myself." But Mug grabbed her hand between his steely fingers and said, "Follow me. To the reading room."

He spoke in short, brusque sentences. Perhaps this was why, and also because of his steely gaze, the boys were afraid of him and the girls often stopped their chattering when he approached. However, Mug was a factory fellow just like all the others, the only difference being that he had once been the worst hooligan in the workers' settlement. Ever since that time his ugly nickname had stuck.

2

When they reached the reading room Mug looked at the others sternly and said,

"Clear out for five minutes, everybody."

The readers closed their books, folded their newspapers and

vanished. Then Mug sat down and stared straight at Manya. She could feel his eyes on her even though she wasn't looking at him.

"Well? What's the matter?"

Manya cheered up. That meant he didn't know. That meant she could lie and she wouldn't be kicked out of the club. She blurted, "I had a fight with my mother. She kicked me out."

Then she looked at him boldly and saw a pair of tired, kindly gray eyes staring at her. Manya had never seen such compassion in them before. As she stared back at him she realized that the deep, menacing furrow across his forehead had suddenly disappeared.

"Why'd she kick you out?"

Manya didn't have an answer ready. Her eyes darted away to the portrait of a bearded Karl Marx. She blinked, and at that moment her eyes once again came in contact with the kindly gray eyes looking at her.

Mug nudged her as if by accident and said, "Hm? Why'd she kick you out, Manya?" His eyes were boring into her. She couldn't escape them. It was more than she could bear. Her eyes closed of their own accord. Then her head dropped, just like a bird's, and she stared intently at a piece of the carpet visible between her hip and her arm.

Someone's hot hand was placed on her shoulder and a strange voice that was no longer kind demanded,

"Well?"

"Don't be mad, Mug. I couldn't tell you. I'm sick of everything, but I trust you more than I do my mother, because you're like you are. Wait, I'll tell you. Don't be mad at me. I'll leave the club anyway. I'll leave by myself, just you don't tell anybody. But I know you. You won't tell anybody."

Manya was out of breath. She had never spoken at such length before. She had never had occasion to.

"I feel sick to my stomach all the time, and I don't feel like eating. All I feel like having is herring. And then, you know, I didn't get my ... you know, what girls have ... and I ... was going out with a fellow ... and ... and ... well...."

She slumped down on the bench, dropped her head on her arms, baring her neck, as if to say that now that he knew all he could kick her out of the club. This very minute, if he wanted to. She didn't care any more.

"Does your mother know?"

"No." She was surprised at the question. "She keeps staring at me all the time, poking holes through me with her eyes."

I lied when I said she kicked me out. But I know she will the minute she finds out."

Manya's voice trembled. She was on the verge of tears. Then anger swelled up in her again. What was he waiting for? Why didn't he chase her out?

"Why do you want to leave the club?" Mug's voice was clear and calm.

"The girls'll all poke fun at me. And the boys'll make me feel miserable. And you, too.... You think I don't know? I'll run away!" She screamed. "I'll run away from home! I'll live just anyplace! I'm no good, and there's no place for me in the club. To hell with all of you!"

She wanted to rush out, but Mug's firm hand gripped her shoulder.

"Wait!"

Perhaps this is what Manya needed, someone to say: "Wait!" in a firm, commanding voice. Perhaps all was not lost yet. Perhaps the posters and portraits on the walls and the warm, cosy, carpeted reading room would always welcome her as it did before.

"Wait!" Mug repeated and Manya was riveted to the floor.

"It's like this.... In a word, nothing's lost yet. Understand? It can all be remedied. I won't explain how and where. There's no time to lose. But tell me one thing first. And don't lie to me. Who was it? Or, rather, is it a club member or not?"

If he had asked her the same question an hour before she would probably never have told him. But now, after she had seen the man horsing around without a care in the world, Manya said indifferently:

"It's Jailbird Volodya."

"Oh! Volodya!" The deep, terrible furrow cut across Mug's forehead again. "So! Let a devil into the club and he'll foul it up! Doesn't he want to marry you?"

"I never asked him. He's been avoiding me the past two weeks, but yesterday I told him.... Well, he didn't say anything at first, and then he began to curse ... and then ... then ... then...."

"Well?"

"He ran away. He turned and ran. I wanted ... I wanted to tell him again today ... but he was laugh ... laugh ... laughing ... and fooling around with the fellows."

"All right," Mug said and his voice became ominous and high-pitched. "I want you to remember that it's not too late yet. So don't worry. Rely on me. Can you rely on me?"

"Sure."

Manya did not feel choked any longer. She looked up at the deep furrow. Whom else could she rely on if not Mug?

"All right then. Go back to the club and wait till I call you."

"What about the girls? They all know."

"Did you tell them?"

"No. But I'm sure they all guessed."

"Don't be stupid! Nobody guessed anything. Tell them it was hot and stuffy in the shop and you didn't have any lunch today, and that's what made you feel sick. That'll shut them up. Yes, one more thing. How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"That filthy rat! What's the matter? I didn't mean you, I meant Volodya. Go on!"

3

Mug stood in the doorway to the gym. Young men in red shorts and naked to the waist were lifting weights and working out. He spoke in a loud voice, "Activists, to the boiler room!"

Two of the boys put down their dumb-bells and began dressing. The laughter and singing in the adjoining room where the drama circle was rehearsing died down. A tall young man wearing a sheepskin hat despite the summer's heat said,

"What? To the boiler room?" and followed Mug. Vasya Sopaty left his post outside the entrance door and followed them.

The tiny room with a cold brick oven was known as the boiler room. In times past the clubhouse had been a tavern and the special boiler had been used for heating water. Now there was a shortage of firewood and sometimes club members who had been working late into the night stayed over.

"Four fellows are missing, but we'll manage without them," Mug said after he had climbed onto the oven. "Well, fellows, this is what's up: Manya Guzikova's pregnant, and the guy who got her in trouble is Jailbird Volodya. He's on the lam, and he doesn't want to marry her."

From then on Mug's words were like hammer blows. Each was punctuated by his fist pounding on the copper lid of the boiler.

"I told you we shouldn't let an s.o.b. like him join the club! Sure, I was a hooligan before, but one fellow'll go straight and another won't. You can tell it from the start. This isn't my main point, though. This calls for some deep thinking. What do we do now? I say we make the s.o.b. marry her or pay her alimony. What do you say?"

"I'd like to see you try," the tall fellow in the sheepskin hat drawled. "He'll say it's none of his doing and no court can make him."

"What's the use of it anyway?" a curly-haired, pleasant-looking boy who had been working out in the gym said. "Say we get them married. Then what? Don't be a baby. He'll get a divorce the next day."

"I don't agree with you, Akhtyrkin. We can keep an eye on him," Mug said.

"I'd like to see you," the tall fellow said again. "Besides, you think she'll be that happy if he marries her? He'll beat the living daylights out of her, that's for sure."

"I say she'll walk out on him the day after they're married," Akhtyrkin added.

"What do you say, Vasya?" Mug asked.

"Uh ... mmm, I guess that's right, but you can't really tell. Uh, I don't see my way clear through this yet."

"How long do you think it's going to take you? We've got to decide this right now. Understand?" The deep crease on Mug's forehead arched as if to pierce Vasya. "The girl's waiting for an answer. We haven't got time to sit around."

"Uh, that's right. Mmm.... That's the only way to decide it. But as far as that goes, uh, there's a lot to be said for it, uh, what I mean is, uh, how can we help her?"

"We've got to help her. That's the most important thing. Helping her," the tall fellow said.

"Well, everybody seems to agree. The way I see it, nobody's refusing to help. The only question is: how? Anybody got any idea? Oh, yes, I forgot to say that the situation at home is no good at all. Her mother'll kick her out the minute she finds out. So?"

Akhtyrkin wound a lock of hair around his finger, yanked it and said,

"I've a suggestion. What if the club supports her till she has the baby? She can live here. Well..." at this he yanked still harder, as if he wanted to pull the strand out.

Vasya fidgeted. "Well, that's ... uh, that's no way out. This is something that, mmm, calls for something. Else, I mean. She should be given, uh ... money to live on. I mean, to be her own boss. Live away from home like."

"Baloney," the tall boy drawled. "What'll she do after she has the baby? Huh? Did you stop to think about that? You think it's just money? What's she going to do after she has the kid?"

"Besides, there's no money," Mug interrupted. "And where are we going to get any? Aren't you forever complaining that the club has no money for new books and no money for firewood? And we'll need a lot for her. Not less than thirty rubles a month. Well? Any other suggestions?"

"She should have an abortion!" a boy who had been silent until then said.

In the stillness that followed they could hear the noise and singing coming from the drama circle across the hall. Then somebody shouted. "Fedya!" and galloped down the hall. Mug said,

"Is it ... isn't dangerous?"

"Not a bit!"

"It's very dangerous," the tall fellow said and sighed. "My mother died in childbirth."

"That's not the same as an abortion. It's a cinch. It only takes a minute."

"That's not true," Mug snapped and the crease on his forehead was now aimed at the fellow who had just spoken. "It's dangerous and very risky. I read about it. A girl can get blood poisoning. It's a very risky business. It's no cinch at all. It's no skin off your nose, but if the girl dies from it, it's the only life she has. Still and all, I see there's only one way out if she agrees. And it's putting a lot of responsibility on us. Do we want to take on this responsibility? Let's hear some opinions."

Someone ran down the hall again, but softly, for this person had on felt boots. A voice from the drama circle was declaiming: "And so, Galileo, we accuse you. And so, Galileo, we accuse you." Then someone out in the hall shouted, "Everybody to the Marxist study circle! Come on, everybody!"

"There's another thing," Akhtyrkin sounded embarrassed. "As it is, we have a bad reputation. They say the young workers' club.... That we have orgies here. And if they find out about this...."

"What!" Mug shouted. "Who said that? Well? Tell me who? What s.o.b. said that? Tell me!"

"It's just a bunch of old hags. Nothing to pay attention to. Who cares what they say? They'd do anything to get at us."

"I want you to tell me who said it, Akhtyrkin. If you can't, I'll tell you: Philistines, that's who! According to you, we're supposed to try to please them. Is that it? Well? That's some brain you have! Why don't you go back as far as the white-guards and repeat what they used to say about us? All right. But, actually, this isn't something you want to talk about?"

"Anybody who breathes a word of this will be sorry," Vasya said suddenly as he jumped to his feet and brandished his huge fist. His hemming and hawing were gone. Vasya was known for these sudden changes of temperament. "Just let anyone try! I'll tear his tongue out!"

"Well, that's that," Mug said and slapped the copper boiler lid. "I'll go back to her now, explain the situation, and we'll see that it's done tomorrow. You go to the hospital, Vasya, and find out what's what. If it can't be done at the state hospital, go to the private one. Find out how much it'll cost. How much money do we have in the treasury, Akhtyrkin?"

"Three rubles and seventy-six kopecks," Akhtyrkin replied readily.

"Well, in case we need it ... I'll get more," Mug said and headed towards the door. "It's got to be done."

Vasya followed him out.

4

From the moment Manya Guzikova, accompanied by Vasya, entered the hospital reception room, was registered as Maria Guzikova, aged sixteen, apprentice, case history No. 102, and put on the clean, cool hospital clothes that seemed so alien, she stopped thinking of herself as just a girl from the textile mill. Manya Guzikova, that mild, plain girl, seemed to have remained outside, in the workers' settlement. Here, on the hospital cot, she was Maria Guzikova, and busy, grown-up people were concerned about her. Very soon something very terrible was going to happen to Maria Guzikova, something which made the flesh creep on her back and her legs tremble and which kept the nightgown cold against her flesh instead of warm from wear as it should have.

"Guzikova, to the operating room," a nurse said indifferently.

Manya rose with difficulty, as if she were gravely ill and walked towards the door. Then only did she notice the pale faces turned to her from the other beds in the ward. The nurse's back moved calmly and efficiently ahead of her. Manya's heart skipped a beat. She felt faint, but she said to herself, "You're getting what you deserve. It's too late to be sorry now." She was nearly calm when she entered the operating room.

The stout, rosy-cheeked, gray-haired doctor turned, walked over to her, tilted her chin up and said,

"So you don't want to have your baby? That's too bad. Come this way, please."

For a while Manya lay on her cot with her eyes closed. When she opened them she saw Vasya sitting on a chair beside her.

"Uh, how d'you feel, Manya? Hm?"

"Go away, go away," Manya whispered fearfully. "Go away before they think ... it was you."

"They won't. Hm." He became embarrassed. "I brought you some bread. Maybe you're hungry. Uh ... here!" And he shoved a large roll at her.

No more than two days and two nights had elapsed since Manya had seen Volodya laughing in the club, but it seemed that she had lived a long, hard life since then. It was as if a large hand had snatched her up and cruelly tossed her into a horrible whirlpool, one that had made her dizzy, had plucked her out of her familiar, simple surroundings, spun her this way and that, and then cast her out of itself and right onto the porch of a small house in the workers' settlement. She would have to think of something to tell her mother. This was the first time in her life that she had not come home at night. They forced her to stay over in the hospital, although Manya felt well and wanted to go home the very same day. What could she tell her mother? If she said she had spent the night at her girlfriend's house her mother would beat her for not having told her beforehand. The summer evening was warm and still. Manya stood on the porch indecisively. Suddenly the door opened and her mother appeared carrying a pail.

"Oh, so you've come?" She set down the pail and crossed her arms on her chest. "So you've come, you tramp?" This was said in a whisper in order that the neighbors would not hear. "So you've come, you slut? So you've come, you bitch? Where were you all night? Huh? Go on inside!"

Manya felt that her mother knew, or at least suspected, the truth. Strangely, though, whenever her mother had scolded or beaten her before she had always been frightened and desperate, but not now. She went into the house. Her mother emptied the pail, returned and flew at her in a rage.

"You hussy! You filthy whore! Don't you give me any back talk! I won't believe a word of it! How dare you disgrace your own mother? You think the neighbors don't have eyes? You think nobody knows what's going on? You slut, you!" She took a step towards Manya, put out her hand and yanked off Manya's red kerchief. "You bitch!"

"I won't let her hit me, not for anything," was the one thought in Manya's mind. Aloud she said, "Give it back!" She held out her hand. "Give me my kerchief, hear?"

"No! I don't want to hear a word you say," her mother hissed and her fingers closed around Manya's hair. She was not like her mother but like a witch, a terrible, gray-haired monster. Manya broke free and darted off to a far corner.

"Give it back! You'll be sorry!"

Her mother rushed at her. Manya's hands rose of their own accord. Her mother crashed into them and sprang away.

"Give it back, or I'll take you to court." Manya said calmly. "I'm not fooling. I'll take you to court."

"Take your own mother to court! What's going on! Who ever heard of such a thing? You sleep around with God knows whom and then take your mother to court? Why'd you go to the hospital, you bitch? Answer me! I'll kill you! I'll show you what a court is like! Don't worry, people saw you going to the hospital with that filthy stud!"

"Give me my kerchief!" Manya grabbed her mother's hand. Her mother wrenched away, tripped, fell and began to wail.

"Help! Murder! She's trying to kill me!"

Manya was nauseated by all this. She pulled the door open and rushed outside. The air was fresh and pleasant. A dog was barking loudly in a garden nearby. Manya stood on the porch for a few moments and then headed towards the club with a firm step.

"To hell with the kerchief. I'll borrow one from the girls. But how can I go to the club? I'll bet the girls found out. Well, I don't care. They'll gossip a while and then forget about it. But I can't look Mug in the eye. I bet he's angry like he always is. He'll look at me as if I'm ... one of those kind of girls. I'm so ashamed. No, I'd better not go." Such were her thoughts.

Manya stopped. The little side street was as calm and blue as ever. A few lights were going on in the windows. It was probably close to ten. There was a break between studies at the club at this time. That meant everybody would be standing around in the hall. That meant she would probably bump into Mug. But where could she go then? Home?

"Ah, there you are!" It was a strangely caressing, familiar voice. Two arms embraced her from behind and would not let her go. It was Volodya. He crooned, "I've been waiting for you, Manya. You know, I feel sort of shy about going over to you in the club. Come on, let's go for a walk," he whispered hotly in her ear.

Manya shoved his hands away, turned, and before she realized what she was doing she punched his sneering, revolting face as hard as she could, spun around and raced off. Her heart was pounding. She had to escape! She could hear him cursing at the top of his voice. His boots thundered behind her, for he was hot in pursuit. "He'll catch up with me. Just one more block to go! No. He'll catch me."

Manya screamed involuntarily as she ran, faster and faster, with a last burst of energy. She raced past another house, and still another. There, around the corner, was the welcoming glow of the red star. Her legs felt numb, they seemed to be running of their own accord. She could hear Volodya panting behind her.

The door opened, as if she were expected, and she flew into the club and practically into Vasya's arms.

"Oooh...." Manya breathed and slumped against a wall.

"Uh, what's the matter?" But Vasya did not have time to hear her answer, for Jailbird Volodya now loomed large in the doorway. Vasya lunged and blocked his way.

"What's the matter? You off your rocker? Let me in!" Volodya growled. "Why don't you let club members in?"

"I do, but you'll have to wait outside," Vasya said, blocking his way.

"How come?" A few more boys now joined Vasya at the door. They were calm and determined and had appeared as if at a signal. They must have been waiting for Volodya.

"Until the club tries you publicly," Vasya said.

"You know where you can go!" Volodya snarled and tried to force his way in, but the boys would not budge.

Vasya moved swiftly and sent Volodya reeling. As he tumbled, Volodya cursed foully.

The girls surrounded Manya. They spun her around and led her down the hall. Coming towards them was the formidable Mug. The furrow on his forehead was like a bayonet. It tilted at Manya. His stern, cold eyes glanced at her. He was about to pass, but noticing Manya's strange expression, he stopped and said,

"What're you moping about?"

Manya wanted to protest. She wanted to say she was strong and brave, but she couldn't utter a word. She suddenly realized that she was moping. Tears sprang to her eyes. Mug noticed this. He slapped her on the back and said,

"Don't worry, little proletarian girl. Go join the others at the study circle." And he continued on his way.

Manya skipped down the hall. A warm, wonderful feeling welled up inside of her. It was probably because the great, com-

radely love of the entire working class towards one of its young, foolish daughters had shone in his eyes.

* * *

I showed Vanya Petukhov the clipping and he said that he believed the story was true-to-life. But I think it's an exception. I think that an abortion cripples a girl. I think girls should have fine, healthy children instead.

We need a younger generation to take our place.

MARCH 15

I've noticed that Venya Palkin hasn't been coming to school for a long time. At first, I thought it was because of the sauerkraut parties, but now I think it's because of something else. However, I'm not going to butt in. I think Nikpetozh is right. Spying on your friends is a filthy business.

Since Sylva and I broke up and I wasn't going out with anyone, I started seeing a lot of Black Zoya. She said she used to hate me for picking on her and that she changed her attitude towards me after the première, when I knocked Seryozha Blinov's rapier out of his hand with such a flourish.

My studies are coming along nicely. I don't have those headaches any more. I give myself a rubdown every morning with snow.

MARCH 21

Sylva came up to me today and said, "I've got to tell you that I've changed my opinion of you completely, Kostya Ryabtsev. I always thought you were a real Komsomol member and were true to our ideology. But now I see that you're just pretending and that your true ideology has nothing to do with the Komsomol."

"I was never pretending. And what makes you think you know what my ideology is?"

"You know very well what I mean. Don't think I don't know what you and Venya Palkin were up to."

"In the first place, I wasn't up to anything. I only went there. And does that mean you wrote the anonymous letters?"

"You horrible, horrible person!" she said and looked me

straight in the eye. "How could you say such a thing? I never expected it of you!" And she turned on her heel.

"Wait, Sylva! Do you really think my ideology goes against the Komsomol?"

"I don't even want to talk to you." And she stalked off.

I was very hurt, but there's nothing I can do, because there's some truth in what she says. Although I never pretended. But I'll prove how wrong she is.

MARCH 23

There was an awful mess, although it's still not clear to me. Lina's father, who's a priest, came to school today to see Big Zina. They had a long talk. He got all red in the face and was trying to prove something to her, and she kept shrugging. Since it all happened in the skworks' room, nobody really heard anything. Then Big Zina left school together with him. She looked very upset and didn't come back until classes were nearly over.

She called a skwork meeting on the spot and we were let out early.

MARCH 25

It's hard for me to write this, but I will.

As soon as I came to school this morning Big Zina called me into her office and said, "Can you be very frank with me, Ryabtsev?"

"Yes." I looked her straight in the eye, because I'm tired of lying.

"Were you ever at those parties thrown by Venya Palkin?"

"Yes."

"Did it ever occur to you that by going there you were not only disrupting your own studies, but were putting the school in an awkward position?"

"I give you my word as a Komsomol member that it didn't."

"What was your idea of the connection between the school and those ... events?"

"I thought that since it was after school and someplace else it had nothing to do with school."

"All right. Supposing that's so. Do you know what happened to Lina?"

"Well, I know she hasn't been coming to school and it's some-

how connected with ... the sauerkraut parties, but I give you my word that I don't really know what it's all about."

"Lina will have to leave school. She's moving away to the Ukraine. I trust that you will keep everything we've spoken about in confidence, just as you never said a word about your sauerkraut parties."

"I will." My mouth felt dry. "But ... I think the girls know more than I do anyway."

"I've already spoken to them. That is all."

"Wait a minute.... There's something I wanted to ask. Does what happened to Lina ... have anything to do ... with sex?"

"Yes." She spoke in a firm voice. "That is all."

I left her office, but instead of going to my class I went home.

After the entry for March 25 several pages were crossed out.

APRIL 5

Here is the letter I got from Lina yesterday:

"Kostya Ryabtsev, I don't blame you for anything any more. I know I'm a lot to blame myself. When you get this letter, Kostya, I'll be so far away I won't feel ashamed. I'm starting a new life now, and all the past, dreary life is behind me and crossed out of my life forever.

"I want you to know that I had an affair with V.P. on account of you. What I mean is that I was so mad at you and so miserable because you were so rude to me, and our suicide attempt was so stupid. All that's gone now, gone, gone and I feel so good and bree. I advise you to stop living that kind of life, too, because it offers nothing but constant gloom, while all that's beautiful in life still lies ahead of you, as it does of me, too.

"I also want you to know that I wrote all those anonymous letters. I was desperate. I was so unhappy. I wanted to break free, but I didn't know how, so I thought that would be a good way. I was wrong. It only made things worse. Now, at last, when I've broken out of the darkness and into the light, I realize how stupid I was.

"You shouldn't have talked to Sylva about that, you know, in the dressing room that day. Sylva's not that kind of a girl.

During the worst part of it all she took care of me like a sister, even though I'd been rude to her before.

"Farewell, Kostya! Be happy and make up with Sylva. And forget me for ever and ever.

Lina"

It's awful when you don't know how to live.

APRIL 10

I met Venya Palkin in the street today. He had on a very smart coat, was carrying a walking stick and had a cigarette clamped between his teeth.

"Ah, Kostya! You still pining away in the slaughterhouse?"

"Yes, I'm still at school."

"What the hell for? You know what? Come over to my place tomorrow. I'm still at the same address. There'll be some girls. Not your stupid schoolgirls, but some real, fine girls. And there's a new brand of wine on the market. You're invited."

"Well, why not? Will anybody I know be there?"

"Sure! Some real, fine fellows. Are you coming?"

"Yes. So long!"

APRIL 12

This is what happened.

As usual, I got to Venya's place at about nine. There were about a dozen kids there. They were all sitting around the table. His parents were gone for the evening. They're never there when he has a party.

Now I can write about everything. I'll describe the sauerkraut parties. A sauerkraut party is drinking and girls, but not innocent-like. It includes a lot of petting. A big bowl of sauerkraut that everybody likes is placed in the middle of the table. Then everybody drinks raw, homebrew vodka till they get drunk. I never saw anything except heavy petting there, but now I guess that more followed.

Anyway, when I got there they were all sitting around the table, including three boys from my school. I don't even want to mention their names here. There were no girls from school. The ones that were there were all painted and powdered and I didn't know any of them.

Anyway, they were half-drunk when I got there. And when they saw me they all began to shout,

"Hey! Here's Kostya! Fill up a glass for him! Things'll start rolling now!"

"Yes, they will," I said and flung the glass they handed to me to the floor. It shattered. "Things'll start rolling, because I finally began to understand what's good and what's bad. You, my dear schoolmates, will now leave together with me and will never come back here again, because everything you're doing now and everything I used to do here before is filthy. Before we go, though, I want to say a couple of words to the other citizens here."

"Are you off your rocker?" Venya shouted.

"No, not yet. On the contrary, I finally came to my senses. Did you ever stop to think how much harm these sauerkraut parties have done, Venya? Did you ever bother to think you ruined a girl's life? You know whom I'm talking about. And that you nearly wrecked the morale at school? You can go on drinking and whoring with your own friends, but leave the school out of it!"

"You stinking louse!" Venya screamed and rushed at me.

That's when I threw a bottle at him, and the three other fellows and I scrambled.

ENTRIES ON LOOSE SHEETS

April-May

APRIL 15, 1924.

I'm so tired my hands have begun to shake. That's how hard I've been cramming for my tests. On account of everything that happened this winter I'm behind in every subject, and summer's just around the corner. If I don't pass my tests now, my summer will be ruined. They say there's going to be a summer school. In the beginning, I thought it was only for the primary grades, but I've just found out they'll make us go, too. That means we'll have to go on excursions again. Seryozha Blinov says that the summer school will show up all the skworks' weak points. He says that if they managed somehow during the winter, they'll certainly make a mess of things in the summer.

I have a new friend. His name is Yura Gromov. But he's not a new boy. He's been in my group all this time, though we were never really friends before. He's full of fun and doesn't like to strain his brain over anything. I told him a bit about myself. For instance, about the sauerkraut parties, but he says to hell with all that and that I should put it all out of my mind.

APRIL 17

Something strange is going on at school. As I was passing the math lab yesterday I heard a burst of laughter. I ran in and saw Nina Fradkina and Stasya Velepolskaya, two girls from the 4th group, sitting opposite each other and laughing.

It was catching, and I said, "What are you laughing about?" By then I was laughing, too.

They laughed still harder and then I noticed the gurgling sound in Stasya's throat. Then the gurgling became a sort of rasping and I got scared. I ran for the skwork on duty (it was Almakfish) and we raced back to the lab. By that time the girls were sobbing. Almakfish said they were having hysterics. I ran for some water and a towel and the girls finally calmed down. The boys asked me later whether I'd care to take over, like I did when I cured Black Zoya last winter, but I said it wasn't my business any more and that the present members of the pupils' committee could worry about that.

I have more than enough to do as it is. A month ago the Regional Board of Education picked my school to participate in the campaign to settle waifs because of what happened to Alyosha Chikin. That was after he stole six rubles and I saw him in the caved-in cellar. The school appointed me its representative at the SLPN, an organization called the Social and Legal Protection of Minors. So now I have to go there. I spend a lot of time with the waifs, and most of it is time wasted. They say that after working with them for three months grown-up people have nervous breakdowns. I think that everything should be done differently. I think we should organize groups of fellows like me and fight the waifs on every corner and then, after a fight, smoke and drink with them. In this way we'll become friends sooner, and before you know it, they'll want to go to school. Or else read them fairy-tales like Vanya Petukhov did. Then there won't be any nervous breakdown. The only objection to this is that it'll take up a lot of our time and boys won't have any time left for their studies. I told the SLPN secretary about my idea and she laughed. It's no laughing matter. She should have discussed it. I can't stand anyone laughing at me. At any rate, their method is no good, either, and I don't think I'll work with them any more.

Alyosha Chikin's father was run over by a truck, and Big Zina became his foster parent. All the kids approved, though Seryozha Blinov says she only did it because she wants everybody to admire her.

APRIL 20

There was a special pupils' committee meeting to discuss the girls' hysterics. I was called in as a witness. The school patrol

was present, too. We elected a patrol group about a month ago to relieve the pupils' committee of all of its administrative duties. There are two patrol members, and they patrol the school just like French gendarmes do in the movies. At any rate, they look just as stupid. I told everyone what had happened and left. I don't think they've decided on any action.

We went on an excursion to the textile mill, the one our Kom-somol group is attached to. In every other way the factory group and our group have hardly any influence on life at school, and I don't think this is right.

APRIL 22

There was a terrible fight in the auditorium today, and Volodya Shmerts got a bloody nose. He gets beaten up so often we've nicknamed him Punching Bag. Naturally, the school patrol couldn't stop the fight, so they had to summon the skwork on duty.

A new plan for self-government was discussed at the general meeting. It calls for members of the pupils' committee to be elected for a term of three months instead of one month so they can work more effectively. As things stand now, you no sooner get into the swing of things than it's time for new elections. Seryozha Blinov said that the longer the term of office, the more power-happy the pupils' committee members will be and, secondly, no matter how long you extend their term of office, even up to a year, nothing will change, because the pupils' committee is subordinate to the skworks and that's why it'll never have any authority.

That's when Big Zina said, "I see that Blinov has gone back to his old ways again. Does he really want the school to be split into two parties again? And this, right before the end of the year, and at such a decisive time, when the examinations are just around the corner? I think he has a bad case of spring-fever.

Seryozha said that spring-fever had nothing to do with it and that he simply wanted to express his opinion. But since the whole place was like a powder keg, Seryozha got mad, too, and raised his voice. At this Almakfish suddenly began shouting. He said that Blinov had outgrown the school and should have enrolled in college, long ago, and a terrible row followed. Big Zina used her power of authority to close the meeting.

Standing out in the hall later, Seryozha swore he'd show the skworks and would do it as a matter of principle. He said he'd prove that he was a revolutionary first and foremost and a pupil and everything else after.

APRIL 23

The latest issue of the "X" came out with a parody on the old children's fable:

The Turnip

Princee planted a turnip of the "self-government" variety. It grew and grew and became very big. Princee grabbed hold of the leaves and tried to pull it out. She pulled and pulled, but couldn't pull it out.

Princee called the Pupils' Committee to help her. The Pupils' Committee grabbed hold of Princee. Princee grabbed hold of the turnip and they all pulled and pulled, but they couldn't pull it out.

The Pupils' Committee thought matters over and called the Management Committee. The Management Committee grabbed hold of the Pupils' Committee, the Pupils' Committee grabbed hold of Princee, Princee grabbed hold of the turnip and they all pulled and pulled, but couldn't pull it out.

They called the Hygiene Committee. The Hygiene Committee grabbed hold of the Management Committee, the Management Committee grabbed hold of the Pupils' Committee, the Pupils' Committee grabbed hold of Princee, Princee grabbed hold of the turnip and they all pulled and pulled, but couldn't pull it out.

The Hygiene Committee called the Skworks' Council. The Skworks' Council grabbed hold of the Hygiene Committee, the Hygiene Committee grabbed hold of the Management Committee, the Management Committee grabbed hold of the Pupils' Committee, the Pupils' Committee grabbed hold of Princee, Princee grabbed hold of the turnip and they all pulled and pulled, but couldn't pull it out.

This was too much for the Skworks' Council and it holle-red, "Help! Patrol!"

The school Patrolman didn't have to be called twice. The school Patrolman grabbed hold of the Skworks' Council,

the Skworks' Council grabbed hold of the Hygiene Committee, the Hygiene Committee grabbed hold of the Management Committee, the Management Committee grabbed hold of the Pupils' Committee, the Pupils' Committee grabbed hold of Princee, Princee grabbed hold of the turnip and they all pulled and pulled, but couldn't pull it out.

The school Patrolman called the Three-Months Plan. The Plan grabbed hold of the school Patrolman, the school Patrolman grabbed hold of the Skworks' Council, the Skworks' Council grabbed hold of the Hygiene Committee, the Hygiene Committee grabbed hold of the Management Committee, the Management Committee grabbed hold of the Pupils' Committee, the Pupils' Committee grabbed hold of Princee, Princee grabbed hold of the turnip and they all pulled and pulled, but couldn't pull it out.

They all stood there sweating bullets, and there was the turnip, still in the ground.

"For God's sake! When will they pull out the turnip?" one of the bystanders said.

"X" thinks the answer is: NEVER!

In no time a lively discussion was raging in the hall by the wall newspaper. Seryozha Blinov was making a fiery speech. Everyone agreed that there was no sense in having a kind of self-government that couldn't do anything on its own. And that it was better to call off self-government altogether if that was the case. However, it was decided there and then to put the matter off until the tests were over and, meanwhile, to keep mum.

Seryozha also said that since our skworks aren't up to the mark they should be replaced and that only after the school embarked upon a revolutionary course would our life and studies become easier.

A lot of the kids objected. I, for one, know from experience that both Big Zina and Nikpetozh are quite up to the mark. It goes without saying that I'm against Yelnikitka and, to a certain extent, Almakfish, but still and all, they're useful at times. But Seryozha says that if we start a campaign against all of them, it means no exceptions.

Nikpetozh and I walked up and down and talked in the gym for quite a while after. He was the one to call me over. By the way, he asked me why Sylva and I weren't friends any more, I told him that after what had happened to Lina, Sylva suspected

me of doing something bad, but I was only guilty of going to the sauerkraut parties. Besides, she says that my ideological outlook is not that of a Komsomol member.

"Yes, Sylphida Dubinina is a fine girl," Nikpetozh said ... and sighed.

"Oh, sure, she's a very fine girl. Only she's real mean. What do you think is so fine about her?"

"She's very demanding towards herself and others, but if she likes someone, she'll do anything for that person.... Do you think I'm happy, Ryabtsev?" he said unexpectedly.

"Sure you are."

"You're not very observant, I'm afraid."

"Well, I think an unhappy person is somebody who's very lonely and who has to get all involved in social activities in order to forget about his loneliness. And a person who has nobody to go to for advice is unhappy, too."

"Are you happy, Ryabtsev?"

"You can't trick me into telling you, Nikolai Petrovich."

We both laughed and parted.

How can he be unhappy if everybody likes him and respects him, and values him? Seryozha Blinov is the only one who's against him. Actually, though, Seryozha's against all the skworks.

APRIL 26

I came to the SLPM when the secretary was out, and since I had to wait around, I started leafing through the papers on her desk. Then I saw a long sheet of paper with a semiliterate scrawl on it and a typed copy clipped to it. I read it over and was amazed, but I had no one to consult, so I decided to make a copy for myself. I was in an awful hurry, because I was afraid the secretary would come in and catch me at it, but I managed to do it and stuff my own copy into my pocket.

Just then she returned. The typewritten copy was back in the folder, but I didn't have time to close it.

She looked at me suspiciously and said, "What were you doing here?"

"Nothing. I was waiting for you."

"Why is the folder open?"

"I was leafing through it."

"Be kind enough not to go poking around in secret files!"

"Why do you spread them all over the place if they're secret?"

She looked very cross and said, "Your idea of participating in our work is very strange, Comrade Ryabtsev, and, in general...."

"And, in general, I'm wasting my time here. I told you a way to plan our work with the waifs, but it only made you laugh." Having said this all very rudely, I walked out.

I reread the copy I had made at home. What really surprises me is the fact that grown men also suffer in a sexual way and they're punished for it. I'll talk it over with Nikpetozh tomorrow, because it's awful to read about this kind of stuff and not know how much of it to believe. One thing, though, you'll never find anything about this in a book.

APRIL 28

The 4th group had its math test today. Stasya Velepolskaya flunked, and when she left the room she stopped outside in the hall and started laughing. There was a crowd of girls waiting to take the test there. At first, they tried to make her stop. Someone gave her some water. But then they all started laughing and sobbing. Stasya fell down on the floor and began jerking, and the others followed suit. What a sight! The skworks came running. When they finally brought the girls to their senses I heard Big Zina say to Almakfish,

"It's mass hysteria. We'll have to do something about it."

The whole episode lasted about a quarter of an hour.

After that I showed Nikpetozh what I'd copied out from the paper I found at the SLPM. At first, he got terribly embarrassed and told me to destroy it and pay more attention to my studies, but when I persisted he said that that was known as sexual perversion and that it occurs from time to time, but that the Soviet system tries to combat it by setting up athletic clubs, arranging lectures, raising the general level of education and etc. I can't say that his answer was much help. This was the first time I ever saw him look embarrassed.

APRIL 30

There was another case of mass hysteria among the girls yesterday after the physics test. The "X" came out with the following article today:

This is to inform our readers that a new educational establishment has been opened in our school: the Hysterical Institute. (And we hope our readers will not confuse it with an Historical Institute.) Graduates will receive a one-way ticket to Damsels in Distress. The subjects offered are: dancing, parties, flirting and all kinds of hysterics, beginning with a small squeak and ending with thunderous laughter. The following girls are the star pupils: N.F., S.V., L.D. and K.R.

"X" suggests the following educational aids:

- 1) A crate of bromide pills;
- 2) An iron statue of a zombie in the gym to be known as "Sorrow". All who wish to can weep on its chest without distracting the other pupils from their studies. The figure should be made of iron so that it cannot be melted away by tears.

We hope that the above suggestions will improve the work of the Hysterical Institute.

There was a crowd around the paper and the boys were laughing. The girls got awfully sore and snatched it off the wall just as Big Zina started reading. She stamped her foot and shouted,

"I don't want to have anything to do with anyone who dares infringe upon freedom of speech in school! Hang the paper back up immediately!"

The girls went off for some thumb tacks and tacked it back up again. We laughed so hard our sides nearly split.

A little while later, and quite by accident, I learned a surprising piece of news. I picked up a crumpled sheet of paper outside the auditorium. It was the article about the Hysterical Institute and the handwriting was Big Zina's. The notation on the other side of the paper read "For the 'X' ". How about that! That means Big Zina writes for the "X"! And it means she knows the editorial board, whereas I still don't. I think it's lousy of them to keep me in the dark.

There's a lot that only I know about, and it keeps multiplying, but there's nobody I can confide in. I'm not on speaking terms with Sylva. Seryozha Blinov and I have drifted apart. Nikpetozh is an adult and he won't understand me, and there's nobody else.

All that remains are the tests I have to take and my diary. This diary has become just like a friend I can confide in.

MAY 10

Hooray! I've passed most of my tests. Nikpetozh congratulated me and said I can consider myself a member of the 4th group. Most of the kids in my group have passed the tests, including Black Zoya and Sylva. Yura Gromov didn't. He hasn't even taken his biology or math tests for January, but he says he doesn't care whether he'll be in the 3rd group or the 4th, because he's not going to graduate anyway. He says he's going to enroll in a cavalry school. He likes the cavalry uniform, especially the red riding breeches. I think that's a lot of baloney. What difference does it make? As far as I'm concerned, I don't care what kind of pants I wear or even if I don't wear long pants, just shorts.

I showed Yura the paper I copied out at the SLPM and he said so what, all men did it, there was nothing so awful about it. If he regarded sex as I do, he wouldn't say that.

MAY 15

Today Big Zina said that only the kids who are remaining in town will attend summer school and that everybody who can should go away for the summer. Then she said she was giving up her own vacation to conduct the school. The program for the summer will include: 1) visiting one of the nearby villages and becoming its city sponsors; 2) taking part in the archeological diggings conducted by the staff of the Local Lore Museum; 3) biology field trips; 4) social studies excursions to museums and former estates. Each of the skworks will be in charge of his own subject.

Summer school starts on June 1st.

MAY 20

My shoes have gone to pieces from playing soccer every day. I don't want Dad to have to spend money on a new pair, so I spend every evening sewing them up with waxed thread. The shoemaker says I'll have to get a new pair anyway. Sewing my shoes takes up all of my free time, so I have no time to write.

MAY 31

Yura Gromov has a sister. Her name's Maria. She's grown-up, but she hangs around with us boys. She stinks of perfume and her nose is as white as chalk. Yura says she powders it because it's really blue. I'll have to check on that. Their father's a cat-skinner. He catches cats and skins them and sells the skins for squirrel pelts. Dad knows him. He says that cat fur is no good, because it sheds.

Maria feels very sorry for me because I have no mother and treats me to tea and jam. Yura even started calling me a "motherless child". At first I felt hurt, but not any more.

The Komsomol is winding up its club work for the summer. Even though I didn't go to the factory club very often, I'm sorry it's closing. Besides, Seryozha Blinov is going away for the summer, and Black Zoya is going to visit her relatives in Leningrad.

Sometimes I feel as though I'm all alone on an absolutely deserted planet with not a soul in sight, and then I feel sorry for myself.



THE SUMMER TRIMESTER

THE SEVENTH NOTEBOOK

June

JUNE 3

Today Big Zina told us what her assignments are for us. First of all, we're to study Golovkino Village from all points of view or, as she put it, in its entirety. The village is five miles from town. We're to get to know the peasants and not act snooty because we're from town. We're to see how they live, and answer all their questions, explaining things they don't know about, and also measure the distance in all directions and, in general, be a link between the town and them. That's the first part.

The second is to observe and write down their songs, stories, legends and beliefs (and also sketch the kind of clothes they wear, but this concerns their way of living, actually); to show us what a popular epic is like, Big Zina read us excerpts from the Finnish epos *Kalevala*. There was a man named Lönnrot, who wandered from place to place in the most remote districts of Finland, collecting songs, fairy-tales and legends and then he made an epic poem out of it. But this didn't happen three hundred years ago, like when Shakespeare was alive, but in the last century, which means not more than a hundred years ago. Maybe Lönnrot had to know all that, but I don't see why we do. Could anybody actually be interested in such crazy superstitions as ghosts and devils? I don't really think peasants believe in such junk. And then again, I don't think we can compare what we find at Golovkino Village with the *Kalevala*, because the Finns had giants. Three of them banded together to get the Sampo mill and they had to fight all sorts of weird forces to get it. How in the world can you compare that to

a Russian witch on a broomstick? Then again, all of our witches and devils are horrible creatures, never heroes. Then, the Finns believe that you shouldn't kill a frog, because every frog was once a person, and also that you have to bring every tooth you lose as an offering to a spider. I think all this is ignorance on the part of the people, and what's the sense of writing it all down? What we need is to have electricity and cooperatives brought to the villages as quickly as possible and then socialism will triumph.

But Big Zina says that it should be recorded, if only because it'll all soon disappear in the bright light of electricity and once it does, no amount of searching will unearth it. If you ask me, no one will even bother to try. I told her just what I thought and she said I have no love for my native tongue, the root of all culture. I had nothing to say to that, and so I had to write down what she told us about Ukko, who made thunder, about Peiva, the Sun, and about Tiermas and his hammer, who slayed all the sorcerers (how about that!).

Besides, we'll be working under the Local Lore Museum, digging in burial mounds. Big Zina says that the mounds are the site of an ancient settlement. The people at the museum think that some warriors, their arms, horses and wives are buried there. And we're to dig them up and pack them off to the museum. This is a dandy assignment, especially the part about the arms. When we dig them up we'll have a battle on the mound. But I don't think we'll ever be able to complete all these assignments, because there'll be more summer assignments from the other skworks.

Nikpetozh isn't feeling well. He's gone on a two-months' leave. He and Sylva walked up and down talking for a long time before he left. I felt pretty sore on account of him talking to her, not me.

Now there's nobody left at all for me to talk to.

JUNE 4

After the biology meeting that Yelnikitka called there was an incident which upset me very much. As I was leaving the lab I saw Volodya Shmerts slap Sylva on the back. She shoved him away. I was about to pass when she shouted,

"Tell him not to annoy me, Kostya!"

Still, I was going to pass them, but then she shouted in a desperate voice, "Make him stop, Vladlen!"

Volodya Shmerts bellowed. He even stopped hitting her and

said, "What's that I hear? Vladlen?" That's when I turned and socked him so hard I sent him reeling, but he jumped right back up and rushed at me. I gave him a second helping of the same and he bounced away to the door. Then he spat at me, shook his fist and left.

Sylva said, "I wasn't fair to you. I know everything now. I want you to forgive me."

"You always knew. So there's nothing to forgive you about."

"No, I didn't. Nikolai Petrovich just told me. Let's be friends again like we used to be."

"We can never be friends like we used to," I said and walked off. I think she started to cry.

JUNE 7

We went to Golovkino Village yesterday. The peasants were working in their gardens. They're mostly vegetable-growers. I was told to study the way they live. I went over to a woman who was planting something and said, "Can I help you?"

"Who are you?"

"We're here on an excursion from town."

"From a school, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Last summer some school boys excursed to Perkhushkovo Village. They were supposed to measure the land or something, but they ended up pinching Arina's trunk."

"We're no thieves."

"I'm not so sure of that. Run along, sonny, and don't bother me."

"Do you believe in the witchcraft?"

She stood up, brushed the earth off her hands and screeched at the top of her voice, "Petya! Pe-tyaa!"

A skinny peasant appeared from behind the fence. He was coming straight at us with a pitchfork. The woman said, "This boy here says he's from a school. And he started right in talking about the devil."

I mustered up my courage and said, "You misunderstood me. I can tell you all about electrification and radios, and maybe I can help you."

"Ah! You mean the link between town and country?" the man said. "That's fine. We've got nothing against that if it's sensible. But why don't you come back on a Sunday, sonny? The people hereabouts have more free time on Sundays."

Well, my first try was no good. I set off along the back gardens. Women and children were busy working there. Suddenly a shaggy dog jumped at me and started barking wildly. I did what I usually do in such a case: I made-believe I was going to pick up a rock, but that didn't stop it. A couple of more dogs joined the first one. Now they were all barking at me. I'd heard that if you wanted to make a dog turn tail you had to stare it down, but since there were so many of them I had to keep turning while I tried to hypnotize them.

"Is this all a part of the link?" a voice behind me said. It was the man with the pitchfork. He chased the dogs away and I walked on, but I'd barely passed two houses when the mutts came chasing after me again and one of them nipped my pants. I got mad, grabbed a stick out of a wattle-fence and tried to fend them off.

"Stop that!" someone shouted. "Put down your stick. They'll tear you to pieces!"

I threw down the stick and saw a man coming towards me.

"What are you doing here?"

"I've come to study your village."

"There's nothing to study here in the back gardens. Don't know what you're tramping around here for. Why'd you break the fence? You didn't build it, did you?"

Then a woman stuck her head out of the bushes and shouted, "Go on! Go on, you thief! All these strangers hanging around here! Before you know it, they'll pinch something like they did Arina's trunk! Vanya! Vanya!" She suddenly screamed. "Count the goslings?" I barely managed to escape and didn't stop running until I reached the high road. The villagers had greeted the other kids in much the same way. Two of them who had a tape measure and wanted to measure the width of the street were nearly beaten.

JUNE 10

I think the same thing is happening to me now that happened last winter, but this time it's not my fault. Besides, I have a more enlightened attitude towards this than I did then. Firstly, because of what happened to Lina and, secondly, because, judging from the paper I copied out at the SLPM, some things are punishable by law. The worst of it is that Nikpetozh is away on vacation. I can't trust Yura Gromov in things like this, and I have no one else to talk it over with, because I'm very lonely. This is what it's all about (and it's been going on for several days):

Yura's sister Maria decided to put on a play. She chose Chekhov's

The Proposal. I'm supposed to play the suitor, and she's going to be the prospective bride. It's not a modern play and rather stupid. It's about landowners. But I agreed, because I want to see whether I can really act. According to the play, I'm supposed to kiss her. I put my arms around her and kissed her at the rehearsal and she said, "Ugh! You got me full of spit. Don't you know how to kiss?"

There were five other kids there and they all burst out laughing.

"Look at him! He got all red in the face!" Yura Gromov shouted.

That did it. I said I was leaving and wouldn't take part in the play. Then everybody crowded around and started coaxing me into staying.

Yura pulled me off to a corner and said, "Don't be a baby! Can't you see that Maria's sweet on you!"

I didn't understand what he meant, but just then she rushed over, shoved him aside and whispered, "Silly! Who cares if you don't know how to kiss? I'll teach you. Want me to? Come to my garden this evening."

They have a little garden in back of their house. I thought it over and stayed, since I had a lot of free time anyway.

That evening I came to the garden. Maria was waiting for me. She had on a transparent blouse and a short skirt. She pressed against me right away.

"First of all, close your mouth and press your lips against my cheek," she said.

I purposely kissed her nose instead and she whispered, "Silly! Here, not here." Still, I saw the spot where I kissed her. Then she started teaching me how to kiss her on the mouth. It was awful, because her teeth are brown and she stinks of tobacco besides stinking of perfume. She's a real chain-smoker. Then she led me off into a dark corner and sat me down on a bench and sat down on my lap. But there was such a stink there, I said, "Phew! What's that? What's the smell?"

She put her arms around me and whispered right into my ear, "Never mind. This is where my dad hangs the cat pelts. Don't pay attention to it."

It was easier said than done. It was just like sitting on a pile of garbage, only worse. I had a hard time shoving her off me. Then I left, but she didn't get mad. I've been there a couple of times since then. We kept kissing like little kids. I can't say I enjoy it. It wouldn't be too bad if it didn't give me a headache every time. That really bothers me.

Alyosha Chikin lives at Big Zina's house now, and he's really changed. Naturally, he fell behind because he was hanging out with the waifs for so long. Now he'll be left back in the 3rd group. He's skinny and pale; and he hardly talks. Big Zina managed to get some sort of a widow's allowance for his mother and the woman came to thank her and wanted to actually bow, but Big Zina got mad at her. I've tried talking to Alyosha, but he only mumbles or mutters in reply.

The day before yesterday Yelnikitka took us on an excursion. It was a biology field trip, but the way things turned out social studies came into it, too, and she doesn't know anything in this department, and that's what caused the incident.

Nearly all of the 3rd group (which is now the 4th group) and some kids from the 2nd group went. There was a lot of lovey-doveying on the way. For instance, Volodya Shmerts stood out on the platform at the end of the car with Nina Fradkina all the way. The boys kept passing back and forth, as if they were going to the can. No sooner would one come out than another went in. Naturally, this made Volodya mad, but it serves him right for fooling around with all the girls, flirting as if he was Harold Lloyd. Nina gave us some real sour looks and that was just what we were waiting for. Then Yelnikitka told us to sing, because people going on an excursion are supposed to sing. We asked her what song to sing and she said, "Descend, quiet evening." We began braying it, because it's such a stupid song.

The conductor came over and gave us a funny look and said, "I thought it was the brakes screeching!"

The trip was a lot of fun.

Then, when we reached Solnechnoye Station, Yelnikitka took the girls off to study nature and the boys went off to play soccer. We played until somebody caught a grass snake. Everybody knows that grass snakes don't bite. Still, it was an event. We took the snake over to Yelnikitka and said (just for laughs), "What kind of a snake is this?"

"It's a grass snake, a relative of the African python."

"Does it bite?"

"No. It's harmless."

Yura Gromov was holding it. At this, he went right up to her and said, "Here, you can hold it."

"What for?"

"To prove it's harmless."

And he shoved the snake at her. It was twisting and turning like crazy. Yelnikitka screamed, and all the girls screamed, too.

"Throw it away this minute! Don't you dare come near me with that thing!" she screeched.

Yura threw it, but not away. He threw it right on Nina Fradkina. She screamed and jerked and we all raced off. Yelnikitka spluttered and said she'd take the matter up at the general meeting. That's her business. She's so busy doing that all the time that nobody even listens to what she has to say any more. You can never laugh or joke in her presence, and if she's anywhere nearby the girls all pull long faces and act like they're untouchable.

Then we went to the estate. There's a state farm there now, but only where the cattle sheds used to be. The manor house and the wings have been turned into a museum. Excursions come here so that people can see how the landowners, the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie used to live. Naturally, we wanted to see, too, but Yelnikitka said, "Since this is a biology trip, we're not going to get detoured. Let's go to the cattle sheds and I'll tell you a lot of interesting things."

What's so interesting about cows and bulls? It might be if we raised them ourselves. That's why the kids said they wouldn't go.

While we were arguing the glass door opened and a man, not too old but sort of dumpy and wearing a brown tunic, appeared and said, "By the way, would you care to see the manor house?"

"Are you in charge here?" Yelnikitka wanted to know.

"That's me." He spoke in a voice that was like a cracked gramophone, and it sounded like he was gargling.

"Do you mean to say that you'll provide a guided tour?"

"Everything down to the last pin!" he said and swayed.

"Well then, come along, everybody," Yelnikitka said. She sounded annoyed. So that was it! She thought she wouldn't be able to tell us about what was what and that's why she didn't want us to go inside the house.

The manager took us through the rooms.

"This is where His Excellency, the landowner Urusov, had his dinner.... And this is where His Excellency had tea.... And this is where His Excellency rested. And this..."

This was too much for Yelnikitka. "Which Excellency? These are Soviet children. (Meaning we're children.) And they don't

know about all those old titles. So please try to make it more simple."

"With pleasure," the manager said and hiccoughed. "We've been told about preserving the local colors. These here walls were painted to make a backdrop. And the angels flying around are called cupids. And this here table is made of china glass, and you're supposed to keep your hands off it. Some people don't and make it all messy." He hiccoughed loudly. "Don't know why I'm hiccoughing. Must be all those onions I ate. I'll be right back. Don't go away." And he left.

"What a strange manager," Yelnikitka said.

"Why don't you explain the rest of it to us, Yelena Nikitichna?" I said.

"If you are forever poking your nose into things that don't concern you, Ryabtsev, it doesn't mean I should, too."

Then the manager came back and we continued on our tour. I noticed that he didn't smell of onions any longer but of something else.

"What's that on the ceiling?" somebody asked.

"That there on the ceiling is the goddess Venice, and riding around her in that chair-o is a shepherd called Vulcano. You can tell he's a shepherd, because he's holding a whip. That painting was done by a famous African painter."

"What was his name?"

"Can't recall it now. A body can't remember everything, you know."

"Hic!" came a sound from the back rows. It was Yura Gromov hiccoughing.

At this the manager sat down on a red plush armchair, closed his eyes and said, "Ah, children! And you, teacher of Red pedagogics. If you'll pardon me for saying so, a little string has snapped inside my head."

"What string?" Yelnikitka wanted to know.

"A diamond one. But that's all right. I'll get up in a minute. I shouldn't have had so many onions."

And he really did get up. We continued on our tour again and entered a big hall with a gallery. There was a huge chandelier, swathed in cloth hanging from the middle of the ceiling. The windows were nearly as big as a soccer field.

"This is where His Excellency Urusov slit his throat."

"Why'd he do that?"

"He saw a ghost."

"What ghost?"

"The White Madame," the manager said in a spooky voice. "She was so del-i-cate and so frail it was too much for His Excellency."

"Ohh," one of the girls breathed.

"I hope you realize that this is only superstition. Will you please tell the children how silly all this ghost-talk is?" Yelnikitka said.

"Hic!" the manager replied. "Those onions'll be the death of me. It's not my fault we're supposed to tell it just like it happened. I didn't actually see it, so what do you expect? Although, come to think of it, I did see the village burn." He leaned against the wall.

"What village?" Yelnikitka said crossly.

"Yepuzikha! As for you, Miss, if you don't like the way I'm telling it, you can carry on from here."

"Yes! You tell us all about it, Yelena Nikitichna!" some of the kids shouted. Naturally, they were only egging her on.

"No, let the manager explain!" the others shouted.

"Let's put it to a vote!" I said. "Whoever's for Yelena Nikitichna, raise your hand!"

The majority did. Was she ever mad!

"I'm not going to explain anything. This is impossible! We're leaving this minute."

"Why for?" the manager said. "S'cheerier with all of you here. You know what? Why don't you come back on the Protecting Veil feast? My woman'll bake you meat pies."

By then Yelnikitka looked about ready to burst.

She said we were to start out for the railroad station immediately. However, no sooner had we got as far as the glass doors than a terrible storm broke. It was three miles to the station.

"We'll wait here a while," she said.

I looked out and saw that the sky was completely black.

The manager was standing behind me. He said, "What's the sense of leaving? You'll all get drenched. Why don't you stay over for the night? We can put some hay on the floor for you and anybody who wants to can sleep in the hayloft. I can get you all the milk you want from the farm."

"Can you get any bread?" Yelnikitka asked uncertainly.

"As much as you want. In fact, if I feel like it, I can stand us to a right snappy party." He rolled his eyes. "How about it?"

"I don't know what you mean," Yelnikitka muttered. "But I've no choice, since it's raining so hard and the children might

catch cold. We'll have to sleep over here. Please show the boys where to get the hay because I won't permit anyone to sleep in the hayloft. And bring us the bread and milk. We'll pay for it."

We crowded around, begging her to let us sleep in the hayloft, but she refused, saying we might get into mischief, and that if we went there anyway, she'd leave. This didn't worry us one bit, but we had to give in because we didn't want to get into trouble with the school council. Actually, Yelnikitka got the short end of the stick. When the manager went off for bread and milk, she said, "He's a very strange man. I'd even say there's something wrong with him. That's why I'm asking all of you not to start any conversations and not to have anything to do with him. I know you'd all like to get chummy but I absolutely forbid it. And that's that."

What right does she have to order us around? Maybe nothing would have happened if she hadn't said that. But after she did, we decided to scare her and the girls.

It was still raining, so we couldn't go outdoors. We started a game of tag. It soon became dark, and since we had no light we had to go to bed. Yelnikitka and the girls took one room and we took the next one. Naturally, we started talking and fooling around, and Yelnikitka hollered for us to be quiet a couple of times.

When everything finally quieted down, Yura Gromov whispered, "Now!"

We'd hidden the sheet in which we'd brought our provisions from town. Yura wrapped himself up in it and we tiptoed into the large hall to rehearse our act. We noticed a tiny light at the far end of the hall. It scared me.

Yura grabbed my hand and whispered, "Wait! What's that?"

"It's probably the manager."

"Boy, did I get scared! Let's go and see what he's doing."

We crept closer and saw the light was coming from under a small door beneath the gallery. We hadn't noticed it before. It was very eerie. The door was slightly ajar. I peeped in and saw a kerosene stove. There was a tea kettle boiling on it with a long tube attached to the spout. There was also a basin, and a bottle in the basin. The manager was fast asleep on a chair nearby.

"He's making homebrew," Yura whispered. "I know. That's how my aunt makes it. See? He's got half a bottle of it."

I moved to get a better look and by doing so pushed the

door and it squeaked. The manager jerked and opened his eyes. He cursed, leaned over the bottle, adjusted something in the basin and sat down again.

"I'm going to laugh," Yura said. "I can't help it."

I felt the same way and was pinching my nose to keep still. Suddenly, Yura snorted. The manager jumped up, rushed over to the door and looked out. We pressed flat against the wall.

"She's walking around and watching me again," he mumbled. "Just you wait. I'll catch you. I'll take care of you."

It was very spooky. Who was he threatening? Yura was nudging me, but I didn't feel like laughing any more. The manager went back into the room, bent down, picked up the bottle and was just about to drink when Yura laughed and so loudly that the sound echoed in the hall.

"Who's there?" the manager yelled and rushed out. He looked in our direction and bellowed. Then he raced off to where everybody else was sleeping.

Yura cast off the sheet and we raced up to the gallery. We ducked behind the railing and peered out. There was a great commotion downstairs where everybody was sleeping. Yelnikitka was shouting the loudest. Then the manager came pounding back into the hall (it had stopped raining and the moon had peeked out so that it was light enough to see) with the boys following. Yelnikitka brought up the rear. She had thrown on her coat.

"There! Over there!" the manager panted, pointing beneath the gallery. "That's where she was standing. She was nearly as high as the ceiling."

"Who?" the kids demanded.

"The White ... Madame."

"Are you sure you saw her?" Volodya Shmerts (I recognized his voice) said. "Maybe you just imagined it?"

"Ha! I saw her just as clear as I see you. But she's not there now. She's wandering around in the other rooms."

"Well, if she's not here let's go back to sleep," Yelnikitka said in a sleepy voice. "And if you start imagining things again, don't disturb us. Call the watchman, otherwise you'll frighten everyone."

"I'm ss-sorry, teacher. If you ever saw the likes of that you'd wake your own father, that's for sure!"

Yelnikitka and the kids left. The manager brought out a small oil lamp. He looked into every nook and cranny and finally went back to his room.

Yura and I stayed in our hiding place for another ten minutes and then crept down to the hall. We were still on the stairs when we saw a shadow appear from the other door beneath the gallery. I nearly cried out, but Yura gripped my arm.

"Who can it be?" he whispered. I could tell he was frightened by the sound of his voice.

The shadow crept along the wall, reached the middle and turned towards us. It was creeping so softly my heart stopped. It moved into the room where the manager was. We froze. Suddenly there was a terrible clatter and roar, and thud, and the shadow darted out again.

"What the hell are you doing, you lousy drunk!" it screamed, loud enough to bring down the rafters. "So that's where you've set up your still? Just you wait! I'll tell the manager all about what's going on here the minute he gets back. Look, everybody! He's locked himself in a closet, making homebrew and guzzling it. Making homebrew and guzzling it!"

"Shut up, you stupid ass!" the manager hissed as he grabbed the shadow by the scruff of its neck. "Can't you understand? There's an excursion sleeping over! You'll wake them up, and then what'll I say? I'll wring your neck! Honest to God I will!"

That was when Yura and I ran down the stairs and dashed back to our room. The shadow shut up instantly.

"See?" the manager said, addressing our departing backs. "The boys probably went to the john and they heard everything. You're making things hard for me, you old bitch."

Meanwhile, Yura and I burrowed into the hay and laughed till we cried.

Yelnikitka finally opened the door of the girls' room and shouted, "Why, of course! I knew it was Ryabtsev. But don't worry, Ryabtsev, you'll be very sorry. Your behavior is so abominable it leaves me speechless!"

"I'm not at all worried," I said and immediately felt bored. Nothing seemed funny any more.

The next morning a man wearing tinted blue glasses woke us up and asked us how we had slept. He turned out to be the real manager who had just come back from town. The other man was the watchman and that was why his explanation had sounded so funny. Then the real manager said that the watchman had been a servant in the original owner's household and that he would probably have to fire him for impersonating the museum manager so often.

On the way back we all laughed at Yelnikitka for having taken a drunk watchman for the manager and having listened to

his explanations with such a serious face. Which goes to prove that if you know biology it doesn't necessarily mean you know about the social sciences!

July

JULY 6

Despite the fact that Big Zina has been looking pale and upset recently (could she be sick?) we went on another excursion to Golovkino Village yesterday. It might have ended very sadly if not for her presence of mind. I went to the factory Komsomol group and though the Secretary was out I got a paper from them addressed to the Golovkino Village Komsomol group, asking them to help me in my study of the way of life in the village.

It was Sunday and the people were out having a good time. Many of the men were drunk, even though it was still early in the day. Unfortunately, the village Komsomol members had gone to a meeting at the district executive committee, which was about 25 miles away. This is what happened.

Big Zina found the chairman and asked him to help us. He sent his son over to help instead. He was about 15. We started taking measurements with our tape measure. Big boys and girls, and children, and women all crowded around us and stared. I decided to put the occasion to good use, so while the other kids were busy taking down the measurements, I began studying their way of life. I went over to some girls and started talking to them. They giggled and hid behind each other, but I kept asking them to sing me a song. They said they didn't know any.

"Did any of you ever see a devil?" I said.

"Sure, here he is!" One of them said and pointed at me.

Then one of the boys came over and said, "You leave our girls alone! Is that what you came here for? To pester them?"

I took out my paper and showed it to him.

He had a look at it and said, "This doesn't concern us. If you're one of the Komsomol people, you go to your Komsomol people, but leave our girls alone."

I was going to argue, but saw that they were about to gang up on me. Besides, there was some trouble where the other kids were.

They had been taking measurements in the area along the back gardens. Some of the village kids who had been standing around

ducked into a garden, picked a lot of green peas and then said the town kids had done it. A woman ran out and started shouting. She shoved Big Zina, waved her fist and yelled, "If you're their teacher, why don't you look after them?"

"I'm not responsible for the village children. My pupils have all been right here where I could see them."

"Do you think I'm blind? There's the one that picked my peas!" she said and pointed at me.

"She's lying! When'd you ever see me picking your peas?"

"And he was pestering the girls!" some boys added.

At this Big Zina bellowed, in a voice like a bull's, something I'd never expected her to do. "How dare you annoy the girls, Ryabtsev?"

The commotion died down immediately. I took out my paper and handed it to Big Zina.

"So what?" she said.

"Well, if I'm studying their way of living, don't I have a right to ask them to sing me a song?"

Just then a hulking peasant, who had been looking on in silence, came over to us and said, "Why don't you leave before you get into trouble? There's nothing for you to do here."

"Yes, why don't you? Good riddance to bad garbage!" the village girls shouted.

Then a drunk peasant joined the conversation. "I know them. They're here about taxes. They're no sur-ve-yors."

"Chase them out before I get my hands on them!" somebody else shouted. The woman whose peas had been picked rushed over to Big Zina and grabbed her arm. At that moment Alyosha Chikin suddenly appeared beside them. He grabbed the woman's hand and jerked her aside.

"What's he doing? Look at him fighting!" the woman screamed. At that a lanky boy grabbed hold of Alyosha's shoulder.

"Stop it!" Big Zina bellowed in the same terrible voice, and her big yellow tooth gleamed like a fang. "I have something to say!"

Everyone quieted down again.

"You don't even know why we're here, but the first thing you want to do is fight," she said in her best teacher's voice. "We're here to help you. We want to be your city sponsors. And in order to be your sponsors, we have to draw up a plan."

"What's in it for us?" someone asked.

"In the first place, you'll have someone to stand up for you in the city. Secondly, you'll know where to go for help. Thirdly, we'll always be glad to help you. Fourthly, we'll send you news-

papers. Fifthly, we'll help you get a grain loan. That's what sponsors are all about."

"Why didn't you say so before?" the tall man said.

"You didn't bother to ask. Besides, I approached your chairman but he didn't even want to talk to me."

"That's just like him!" the drunk said cheerfully. "You don't fool around with him. He says he's Soviet power here."

"We'll be going now, because you wouldn't let us work on our project," Big Zina said. "Good-bye for now. We'll leave you our address. Come to see us at our school. And we'll come back again. Come on, boys and girls."

"What about my peas?" the peasant woman said.

"You know that you can do with your peas," the drunk replied. "Can't you see these here people are all educated town people? Can't you understand that?"

The village children accompanied us for quite a way. They kept chanting: "Sponsors! Spongers!"

Back in school again Big Zina said, "We'll have to keep our promise, you know."

"We will! We will!" we all shouted.

JULY 10

I'm now convinced that Lord Dalton wasn't that crazy when he invented his Plan. Naturally, a person should learn from his own experience, because if he learns just from listening to others it's not the same as what actually happened.

We put on our play at the Gromovs' yesterday. It was *The Proposal*. Afterwards Yura's father invited everyone to stay for supper. We all had wine, including me. We sat around for a long time after, and then Maria called me out into the hall. It was so dark there I bumped into the door jamb and gave myself a black eye, but I didn't say anything, probably because the wine had made me dizzy. Then Maria dragged me off into a cubbyhole.

When it was all over I suddenly began to smell an awful doggy or old goat smell and nearly threw up.

"What's that stink?" I said.

"It's Pa's pelts. Don't pay any attention to them," she whispered. "And stop hollering."

It was too much for me. I left. On the way home I felt dizzy. My heart kept pounding, and the whole thing nauseated me. I only hoped that Sylva would never find out. But how can she? She

hardly ever talks to Yura and has been hanging around with Volodya Shmerts. I don't know what she sees in him. The worst part of it is that she doesn't seem to realize that Volodya fools around with all the girls, and now she's become just one of the crowd. It must be very hard to take for a girl, especially for Sylva, because she's very proud. She's probably prouder than all the other girls at school.

JULY 13

I went to Golovkino Village today as a sponsor and asked Vanya Petukhov to come along, just in case. He's on vacation now. On the way we talked about sex. I told him about the paper I'd copied out at the SLPM and wanted to know what he thought of it.

"Well, maybe somebody does awful things like that, but they're a hangover from the old regime. You don't need unnatural things now, because everything can be simple and natural."

I told him there were some words in the SLMP paper that I didn't understand, and as for the "simple" way, it was lousy, too, especially after it was all over.

"It just means you're not used to it yet," Vanya said. "Then again, who the girl is means a lot, too."

"What if she's twice as old as you?"

"Those kind are filthy bitches and you never know what they're after."

Before we knew it we reached the village. It was a Saturday evening and some girls were out on the meadow. They were dancing a funny kind of a dance. They'd grab hold of each other's waist and waltz around. The boys were standing on the sidelines. Some of them had accordions.

"Can we watch?" Vanya said.

"Got any tobacco?" one of the boys replied instead of an answer.

"Sure!"

We smoked for a while and then one of the village boys said, "You can look all you want to."

They all stood around and stared at us. It made me feel funny.

"My friend here knows a lot of fairy-tales," Vanya said.

I jabbed my elbow into his side, but the girls said,

"Come on, tell us a good story."

"I don't know any. He was lying."

"I never lied in my life!"

I thought for a moment and then began. "There's a country called Finland. There are a lot of lakes and rocks there, and once upon a time there were giants, too." And I started telling them the story of the *Kalevala*. Soon most of them were sitting in a big circle all around me. Naturally, I left out all the long, hard names like Väinämöinen, but I put all the legends and customs into it, like the part about never killing a frog.

As soon as I told them that, according to the Finns, frogs used to be people, one of the girls threw up her hands and gasped, "Oh, my goodness! And we've been putting them in anthills!"

"What for?"

"It's a charm," one of the boys said and laughed. "Who'd you want to cast a spell on? Was it Stepan?"

Then we all sang and danced. (Though I never danced before, it was fun there.) On the way back Vanya said, "If we wanted to we could have stayed over. Which girl did you like?"

But I didn't want to talk about it. Things are so simple according to him.

JULY 18

"Is it true that your principal is getting Chikin's allowance?" Dad asked me.

"You must be crazy!" I was stunned.

"Well, why not? The boy's living at her house, and that means she's entitled to the money."

"That's a lot of hogwash! She'd never do such a thing. It would mean taking money from a poor old woman. And how much money is it, anyway?"

"They say it's over 20 rubles."

"You spit at whoever said that!"

JULY 20

At the suggestion of the Local Lore Museum we started out for the site of the ancient settlement near Perkhushkovo Village at dawn yesterday. The museum staff was busy digging when we got there. We rested up after our hike and had a bite to eat, and then started digging, too. Time dragged on. It kept getting hotter and hotter. We even took off our under-shirts. Suddenly Yura's shovel hit something and he picked up

a black disc. The curator looked at it and said, "It's just a button."

We were about to give up digging in that mound when we suddenly started bringing up bones. I dug one up, too, and the curator said it was a horse's shinbone. We unearthed quite a pile of bones by the time five young peasants came over.

One of them said, "Do you have permission to dig here?"

"Certainly," the curator said and showed them a permit.

But the peasant said, "We can't let you dig here, because you're digging for buried treasure, and this here land belongs to the district center. You have no right to dig on our land."

They argued back and forth and finally the peasants threatened to get the whole village down on us.

So the curator said, "Let's dig together. We'll give you shovels. You can have all the gold we find, and we'll take whatever else there is. If this doesn't suit you, go call your friends."

The peasants had a conference. We could see they didn't want to cut anyone else in on what they might find. They were given spades and began digging, but I noticed they were digging off to a side. The museum people kept calling them over, but they kept on digging apart from us. All we dug up were bones.

"How strange," one of the museum people said. "I never knew any mound to contain so many animal bones."

The peasants stopped digging after about half an hour. They threw down their spades and headed home.

As they were passing us, one of them said, "What do you need the bones for?"

"Bones are of interest, too. They can tell us when this mound appeared and many other things besides."

"Well then, why don't you go over to that there meadow? There are only horses buried here, but there are cows there, too."

"What horses?"

"We had an epidemic of hoof and mouth disease about ten years ago. All the animals were buried here and on the meadow. But there are more bones over there."

So we moved to the next mound, but no matter how hard we dug, all we came up with was one pre-revolutionary coin.

The museum people say it was a mistake and that the wrong mounds were marked. The way I see it, they should have asked the peasants where to dig first and then started digging.

JULY 22

The school is coming back to life as more and more kids are returning. By the way, Seryozha Blinov is also back and we had a rather important conversation.

"I've finally decided to stage a revolution in school," he said. "Everybody knows our skworks aren't up to the mark. We need a fresh, healthy spirit here and not the junk they feed us."

"I don't know. I don't think that'll be in the Leninist spirit. We have to graduate from here and go right on to college."

"I hear you've gotten yourself down on the list of goodie-goodie boys."

This made me real mad and we had an argument.

Today Dad brought up the subject of Big Zina again.

"Chikin's widow has been talking to the neighbors, saying she isn't getting her full allowance."

"They probably take taxes off it."

"No. They say it goes to your principal for Alyosha's upkeep. The widow says she can feed and clothe him herself if she gets the full allowance."

"That's a lot of hogwash, Dad. I told you Zinaida Pavlovna would never take a kopeck that didn't belong to her, and I'm repeating it now again."

"Yes, that's so, but you can't shut the widow up. She says she'll go to court."

What a stupid ass she is!

JULY 25

A bombshell exploded in school. It was the arrival of the school inspector. Since this is the end of July, more than half of the kids were present. We were supposed to go for an outing to the woods today but had a general meeting called by the inspector instead.

He began by announcing a general revision of the school in which a representative of the skworks and one of the pupils, too, would take part. We all started shouting, but the majority voted for Seryozha Blinov. For some reason or other the skworks appointed Yelnikitka.

A rumor spread, and I don't know how it got started, to the effect that someone sent in a report on the school, pointing out that things are taking a bourgeois slant and that the skworks

aren't up to the mark. What a lie! But some of the kids started whispering and Grisha Blinov, Seryozha's kid brother, was one of them. I sent one of our kids over to the whisperers to see what was up and learned that if there's going to be an investigation, they want to hand in a list of injustices, accusing the skworks of behaving like teachers in pre-revolutionary times. I started agitating against the whole business, but most of the kids were waiting to see what would happen and didn't take sides.

Grisha Blinov flunked his social studies, math and Russian grammar, and he's been left back in the 2nd group.

JULY 26

The Auditing Commission meets in the teachers' room. Naturally, we're not told a thing. Seryozha Blinov is as snooty as anything. More kids have joined Grisha Blinov's party, but I still have only as many supporters as there were at the beginning. I was passing the auditorium and looked in. There was nobody there except Sylva and Volodya Shmerts. I was about to ask them whose side they were on, mine or Grisha Blinov's, but changed my mind and walked away. I was thinking that whenever I was faced with a problem before, Sylva had always been my true friend and adviser. But now I have no one to turn to. That made me feel very depressed and hurt, because I don't feel I'm to blame in any way as far as she's concerned and I never was. I wandered around the school yard for a while and then went home, but I couldn't calm down.

What does she see in him?

JULY 27

I was at Maria's. It's filthy and disgusting.

JULY 28

I wrote a poem, even though it's awfully stupid.

*I recall your wise discourse
And our silent bond amidst the noise of school.*

*No matter that you speak now to another,
I feel complete with you. Without you I am lost.*

I wonder whether it's any good or not?

JULY 29

The inspector called in some of the kids and questioned them about teacher-pupil relations. The skworks are all very upset these days. Nikpetozh is back. He asked me what was going on, but I couldn't give him a clear answer, because my mind is elsewhere.

"It's a disgrace. The inspector isn't doing the right thing. He should have begun by calling a meeting of the school council," Nikpetozh said.

A few minutes later the inspector summoned me. When I entered I saw Yelnikitka, who was terribly pale, and Seryozha Blinov, who had his eyes on the floor.

"Comrade Ryabtsev, will you tell us what you know of your principal's attitude towards the pupils," the inspector said.

"I'll answer that at the school council meeting, comrade."

"I'm authorized to ask you."

"You can show your official papers to the meeting of the school council," I said and left the room.

Then I went to find Black Zoya and said, "Do you remember what you told me last spring?"

"Yes." She stared at me wide-eyed.

"That means I can rely on you completely. I want you to read this poem. It's not about you. Tell me what you think of it."

"I know it's not about me," she drawled and read it. It took her a long time, because she read it over a couple of times and was probably mulling over every word.

I was dying to know her opinion, but she didn't say a word. Finally, I said, "What are you trying to do, memorize it?" Then I saw that she was crying.

She sobbed and said, "You had no right to give it to me if you wrote it for somebody else."

I took the sheet of paper out of her hand and walked away. I can never understand girls!

I bumped into Volodya Shmerts and Sylva in the gym. I let them pass and said to their backs, "One who's been beaten is worth two who haven't!"

"What's the matter, Ryabtsev? I'm not annoying you. Why are you pestering me?" Volodya said.

"Just for nothing," I said and walked on. Sylva looked at me in surprise.

JULY 30

The Auditing Commission is still hard at work, and there's a rumor going around that the skworks have sent a protest to the Board of Education and even that they all want to resign at once. I've spoken to some of the kids about it and we've decided to go into action.

This is what happened to me. I went to the Gromovs' and found Maria at home alone again. She tried to get her arms around me and said I was a pig, because I hardly ever go there any more.

And I said, "I think this is sexual perversion!"

"Why?" She looked astounded.

"Let's go out to the garden, and I'll read you something."

There I pulled out the paper I'd copied at the SLPM and read it out loud.

Maria got all red in the face and said, "What's that muck?"

"That's how I feel when I come here!"

"But why?" I could see her nose getting red under the powder. "I thought you liked it."

"Well, I don't! And I don't want to go crazy. Good-bye!"

"You're just a stupid kid, that's what you are!"

"I'm glad you think so!"

"And you have no legal right to leave me. Times have changed now. I'll sue you for alimony."

She kept on shouting, but I was on my way out by then.

You have to have kids to sue for alimony. She can't trick me.¹

JULY 31

Today was a decisive day. I warned some of the boys beforehand, and at 4 p.m. there was a general meeting. The only skwork present was Yelnikitka.

I attended with all the boys I could trust and we took seats in the front rows, right in front of the inspector and

¹ Note: A crazy guy appealed to have some mythical punishment for abnormal sexual relations abolished and wrote to the SLPM about it.

the commission members. Since Yura Gromov has the loudest voice, we put him in back of the commission members.

The inspector was the first speaker. "Well, comrades, I've come here as a representative of the Board of Education which checks on the work of the various educational establishments and, if necessary, intercedes to do away with any shortcomings. I can't say I've noticed anything so terribly bad here, but I'm sorry to say the school has acquired an undesirable slant. Be that as it may, the Auditing Commission, with me as its Chairman, has come to the following decision...."

"I refused to sign it!" Yelnikitka suddenly shouted, interrupting him. She turned very pale and fell back in her chair. Somebody came running with the smelling salts. She sniffed the salts and came to her senses.

"And so, comrades," the inspector continued, "to begin with, the decision states that the teachers of your school are not quite adequate...."

At this I gave my signal.

"That's not true! Down with it! We're against it!" my gang shouted.

"Down with it!" Yura bellowed in back of the inspector, making him jump.

Stasya Velepolskaya was chairing the meeting. She began ringing her bell as hard as she could, but order was not restored until I gave my second signal and my gang shut up. In the stillness everybody heard Grisha Blinov shouting,

"Who do you think you are, Ryabtsev!"

At that I got up and said, "Let's not get personal."

The inspector continued, "Besides, comrades, the Auditing Commission has decided to discuss at the general meeting, after reviewing the facts first, naturally, the question of whether or not teachers who do not enjoy the prestige among the pupils can remain in school."

At this I gave my signal again. When they finally managed to stop the noise, Seryozha Blinov got up and said,

"I'm speaking here in a double capacity. In the first place, as your comrade, and, in the second, as your elected member of the Auditing Commission."

"What are you, a two-headed eagle or something?" I shouted.

"At any rate, I'm not the one-headed viper I warned on my breast. (I don't know what he meant by that!) I support the recommendation of the Auditing Commission, comrades, for the following reasons: the state of self-government at school

is worse than bad and is useless; instruction is disorganized and has nothing to do with real life. The school is not linked to any industry."

"Why didn't you speak up before, Blinov?" Yelnikitka screeched. "After all, you're a member of the Komsomol group."

"If you listen to what I have to say more or less calmly, comrades," the inspector said, "I have the following announcement to make: we are not going to draw up a final decision, which can only be done by the Board of Education. We will simply discuss the above matter and record the opinion of the school in the minutes."

"I'd like to say something," I said. "The secretary of the factory group to which we're attached is here, but he can have the floor later. I'd like to say something first. Seryozha Blinov, did you stay over in the old manor house at Solnechnoye like Yelena Nikitichna did? Did you see the White Madame? Did you stand up for us when the peasants wanted to beat us up, Seryozha Blinov? Did you give up your vacation and spend the summer with us like Zinaida Pavlovna did? Did you take Alyosha Chikin into your home when his father died? And did you ever give us clear answers to all the problems that are so confusing they'd make anybody dizzy, like Nikolai Petrovich always does, Seryozha? You say the school has no link with real life. But where were you this summer when we risked our lives to study village life, when we collected important scientific information and helped dig up the ancient burial mounds? You were warming your gut in the sun, that's what. According to you, Seryozha, you're a fine pupil, but Zinaida Pavlovna isn't a good teacher. Is that it?"

I didn't give any signal this time, but there was a terrible commotion. Some of the kids shouted in favor of what I'd said and others were against it. The Secretary of the factory Komsomol group asked for the floor.

"I don't agree with the inspector. He said that his actions were rational, but he didn't discuss the matter with our Komsomol group. If the inspector had come straight to us we'd have told him that even though there are shortcomings in the school everything is proceeding normally, and it would have been very strange if the group didn't know that the teachers were not up to the mark. At any rate, this is the first time I've ever heard of it. It wasn't at all rational of Comrade Blinov to keep the Komsomol group in the dark. The way I see it, Comrade Blinov simply didn't feel he was on firm ground."

"I didn't think it was that important," Seryozha mumbled.

"You're wrong. This is a matter of social importance, Comrade Blinov, and I want everyone to know that if not for Comrade Ryabtsev, who apparently understands the responsibility of the Soviet youth better than many others, things might not have turned out rational at all."

"Good for Kostya!" Yura Gromov yelled, but I signalled to him and he shut up. Then I saw Big Zina come in.

"As far as the ties with industry are concerned, I think we are the ones who know about that best, Comrade inspector," the Secretary continued. "You're invited to our group, and we'll tell you all about it. As for Chikin, whom the principal has taken into her family, the Komsomol group has authorized me to publicly commend your principal, Zinaida Pavlovna, for her concern about Chikin and also for her 20 years of selfless labor in the name of..."

There was a storm of applause. I thought it would bring the ceiling down. The Komsomol Secretary laughed, waved and made his way towards the exit. I had to shout in his ear, because he wouldn't have heard me above the noise,

"Where are you going, Ivanov?"

And he shouted back, "I see you can manage without me!"

I looked around for the inspector, but he had vanished. Yelnikitka was bearing down on me, and I made a dash for it, but the place was very crowded.

She caught up with me and shouted, "I've changed my opinion of you, Ryabtsev!"

What the hell do I care what she thinks about me? Suddenly Black Zoya grabbed my arm and said,

"Wait, Kostya! You have to make up with Sylva. And remember that I was the one to tell you."

Sylva was standing behind her, looking at me. She said, "Well, Vladlen?"

And I shook her hand.

August

AUGUST 5

There's nothing much to do at school yet, so I spend most of my time playing soccer. Daddy broke the bank and bought me a pair of soccer boots, and I'm on the second team now. They won't take anyone who doesn't own soccer boots on the

second team. I play right half, though sometimes I stand in for the inside right. I tried to be the goalie, but the captain transferred me, because I kept running out of the goal area. The way I see it, what's the use of having a goalkeeper if he just stands around waiting for someone to score a goal? They'll smash a ball in from two feet away, they don't even have to kick it in, and there's nothing you can do when it's that close. I was awfully mad, because the goalie's the most important man on the team. Besides, he always gets all the applause. Nobody ever notices the halfbacks. But I gave in to the captain's decision, because a soccer team is a collective and there should be very strict discipline. Otherwise you can lose the game.

For instance, Yura Gromov, who's on my team, plays left halfback. He dribbles too much, and the inside right and sometimes even the right half always get the ball away from him. We've talked to him about it and told him that that's no way to play, because if every player hogs the ball you'll never be able to get in any passes. And that any team that's good at passing will beat us. But Yura's very stubborn. He says that Kukushkin, the famous left half also dribbles as much as he does, and that's the easiest way to get past the backs and reach the goal. The captain finally warned him that if he didn't stop hogging the ball he'd transfer him to the third team and wouldn't let him take part in any important matches. Yura promised he wouldn't but when we played the third team yesterday he was back to his old tricks again. This time he managed to outwit the backs three times though and score three goals, but the captain bawled him out anyway. Then Yura said he didn't know what offside meant, and that if you pass the ball in front of the goal there is always the chance that the referee will blow his whistle. Then the captain said, "Pass it with your hind leg and there won't be any offside."

Everybody laughed. On the way home I said to Yura,

"I think he's going to transfer you to the third team anyway."

Yura said he couldn't care less. If I was transferred to the third team I wouldn't play any more. At least, not on this field.

AUGUST 6

Most of the kids are back now, and Big Zina suggested that we come to school every day and that regular studies be resumed. She said that those who didn't want to didn't have to attend

classes, but could just come for the excursions and outings. She also said that whoever was going to attend classes shouldn't play hookey and should promise he would not. Most of the kids at the general meeting agreed, because the classes won't be conducted as usual. It'll be more like hobby groups or club work: some of the kids will put together a radio set for the school (with Almakfish advising them), and others will put on a play (with Nikpetozh to coach them); Big Zina said she'd conduct a seminar on Pushkin, because Pushkin was a great poet and it wouldn't hurt us to know some of his poetry by heart. Then Volodya Shmerts wanted to know why Pushkin was killed. And Big Zina told us about a guy named D'Anthès who hung around Pushkin's wife so that Pushkin had to challenge him to a duel. The duel ended fatally for Pushkin. If I were him I'd never have challenged D'Anthès to a duel. I'd just have called him aside and given him a bloody nose, and if he wouldn't have stopped annoying my wife, I'd have given him a nice ramming jolt bellow the belt like a good soccer player. That would have taken care of him quick. I can tell that that D'Anthès was a pretty good louse, like Volodya Shmerts, who pesters all the girls and who's always getting beaten up.

There are all kinds of crazy rumors going around the school, and the girls are way up front spreading them. They whisper in the corners and look very mysterious and we finally find out it's all a lot of bunk.

For instance, this is a story they're telling about something that happened in Moscow last year:

A girl in a pink dress came to see a Dr. Snegiryov and said her mother was sick and would he come to see her. She told him her address and left. No sooner had she gone than the doctor discovered that he'd forgotten to ask her what was wrong with her mother so's he'd know what to take for her. He called in the maid and told her to hurry after the girl and bring her back. The maid said she hadn't seen any girl. Then the doctor called in the doorman who also said he hadn't seen a girl. The doctor was stunned. He went to the address the girl had left and saw there was a sick woman in the house. She asked him how he'd discovered that she needed a doctor, and he said her daughter had summoned him. Then the woman began to weep. She said her daughter had died three days before and that her body was still in the next room, because she was unable to have her buried. The doctor went into the next room and saw the girl in the pink dress who had come to his office stretched out dead on the table.

Which would mean that corpses can get up and walk around. When I heard the story all I could do was spit in disgust.

AUGUST 7

Something unpleasant happened. I had a run-in with Big Zina. It all happened because I had promised, like everybody else, to attend school regularly, but today I spent the whole day playing soccer and by the time I got to school the club work was over. I bumped into Big Zina. She said she hadn't expected that of me.

So I said, "Not expected what?"

"A breach of discipline and disruption of our club work."

I said it was still summer and natural for me to be spending more time outdoors than indoors and that, in general, a person should exercise as much as possible.

But she said that this should be done in an organized way and, since I'd promised, I shouldn't break my promise. Besides, according to her, soccer isn't exercise but a very harmful game that can only be compared to smoking or drinking. She said a person gets hooked and can't break away from soccer, and that I was a good example.

I tried to make her see that soccer develops a feeling of collectivism as well as being a good muscle-builder, but she interrupted and said that the results she saw were just the opposite, namely: since I didn't attend classes on account of playing soccer, how could I talk about soccer developing a person's feeling of collectivism?

In a word, it was a very unpleasant talk, and now I'll have to put up a fight to defend my right to play soccer.

I hung around school for a while. Then, when I was about to leave, Sylva called me. We went to the auditorium and I told her about my talk with Big Zina, and Sylva said she thought Big Zina was right, because the boys spend too much time playing soccer. I was going to disagree when Black Zoya stuck her head in and said, looking very mysterious, "I have to talk to you, Kostya."

I got up and followed her out into the yard. We sat down on a bench and she said,

"I want to tell you about something. I hope you'll excuse me for interrupting your cooing, but going off alone with Sylva might give the kids and the skworks, too, funny ideas.

Even though I like Sylva, I don't like the way she's been acting lately."

I got mad and said, "If that's all you wanted to say, you can go to hell. There's nothing I have to coo about, and Sylva's just a friend to me. And what's so special about the way she's been acting? What sort of funny ideas do you mean? It's all a lot of hogwash, and I don't know why you're sore at her."

"Take it easy and sit down. I called you out to tell you something. Listen.

"My brother got back from the south yesterday, and I saw that his hand was cut. This is what he told me and my mother. My brother's a flyer. He's stationed someplace in the south. I think it's called Sukhumi. One day there was a party about ten miles away and my brother was invited. They all had a lot to drink. Then, when the party was over, my brother started back to Sukhumi. He's in the Air Force and has a real gun.

"The night was as dark as pitch. My brother says the nights in the south are much darker than they are here. Anyway, after a while he saw he was lost. That was probably because he was a little drunk. Well, everything was as black as pitch. Then he decided to keep on walking straight ahead till he got someplace.

"After a while he saw some lights. He decided it was a Tatar village. Just outside the village somebody stopped him and said, 'Where are you going?'

"My brother said he was going to Sukhumi. Then the man who'd stopped him said he'd take him to the Sukhumi Road. My brother followed him, but he kept his hand on his gun just in case. They walked on past the village. Soon my brother began stumbling over rocks.

"'Where are you taking me?' he said and took his gun out of the holster.

"Then the man whipped out a flashlight and shone it right into his eyes. He had to shut his eyes tight from the shock of the light after such darkness. Still, he raised his gun.

"Just then somebody hit his arm from behind, knocking the gun out of his hand. The man who was shining the flashlight on him was holding a gun on him, too. There was another man in back of him and he was also armed. The first man told him to follow him and to keep quiet. He had to obey."

"I'd have rushed him. I'd have rammed my head into his stomach, knocked him over and grabbed his gun. And then I'd

have shot the second guy with the first guy's gun," I said.
"I just bet you would," Zoya said. "While you'd be busy getting the first man's gun the second would shoot you in the back. Anyway, my brother followed them. There was a little light from the first man's flashlight. My brother saw that there were weird rocks all around them.

"When they reached a certain spot one of the men bent down and picked up a shovel and said to my brother, 'Start digging!'

"My brother decided they were making him dig his own grave, but since there were two guns trained on him, he had to start digging. He was surprised to see that the soil was loose and easy to dig. He soon had a hole half a yard deep. Then his shovel hit something hard.

"I'm not going to dig any more. There's something hard here," he said.

"Then one of the men bent down, jabbed his dagger into whatever it was and pulled up a board and several more. There was a dark hole underneath. The man told my brother to get down into the hole. He wanted to know what for. They said that if he started asking questions they'd shoot him, so he did as he was told."

"I'd never have climbed down into that hole," I said.

"What would you have done?"

"I don't know. I'd have attacked them. Anything would be better than being buried alive."

"Well, my brother climbed down. It was a deep hole. The two men stood up on top shining their flashlight into it.

"When my brother got to the bottom one of them said, 'Let's have the coffin.'

"Which coffin?"

"Have a good look. There should be a coffin down there."

"My brother looked around. They held the flashlight farther down and then he saw it. It was a coffin wrapped in white cloth. He tried to lift it, but couldn't. Then he said, 'It's too heavy. I can't lift it.'

"Then get the cloth off it."

"My brother unwound the cloth and handed it up.

"Now open the coffin."

"He tried to open it, but just bruised his fingers. 'I can't. The lid is either nailed on or screwed on.'

"Here, take this dagger.' And they threw the dagger down to him.

"My brother took the dagger, stuck it in the crack under

the lid and pressed hard. The lid flew off. He saw a very beautiful young woman in the coffin. She was swathed in the same kind of cloth that had been wound around the coffin.

"One of the men said, 'Is there a dame there?'

"Yes."

"What does she have on?"

"The same kind of cloth."

"Take it off."

"He had to do as he was told, so he unwound it. There was about sixty yards of it."

"How much will that be in meters?"

"If you make fun of me, I won't tell you the end of it. Anyway, he unwound the cloth and handed it up to them.

"Now let's have the dame."

"What?"

"Lift her out and hand her up."

"My brother finally managed to pick up the corpse and hand it up to them. They grabbed hold of it. Maybe it got caught on something, or maybe they thought my brother was pulling it back down, or maybe they wanted to steady it with the dagger, using it like a fork. Anyway, they jabbed the dagger into his arm instead of the corpse and he yelled.

"What are you yelling about?"

"You slit my arm up to the shoulder," he said. He let go of the corpse and it fell.

"Then take the rings off her fingers."

"He wrapped his handkerchief around the gash and bent over for the rings, but they wouldn't come off. He felt as though the corpse was resisting.

"They won't come off."

"Then chop her fingers off."

"I won't."

"Why not?"

"I just won't," he said and fainted.

"I don't know how long he was unconscious, but when he finally came to he saw the starry sky in a square frame and he couldn't understand where he was. He lay there for about five minutes and suddenly saw a head with smoldering eyes appear inside the frame. He screamed, but the head screamed still louder and disappeared. Then he passed out again. When he came to a second time he was in a little room and an investigator was sitting beside him.

"Are you Travnikov?" the investigator said.

"Yes."

"Tell me what happened."

"And my brother told him what had happened."

"It sounds like the truth. You're in the cemetery gatekeeper's cottage at the Tatar cemetery. I'd like you to tell me how this happened to be in your pocket." And he showed my brother a severed finger with a ring on it.

"My brother looked at it and said he didn't know. Then he asked the investigator to explain what it was all about. And the investigator said that the men were grave-robbers and that, with my brother's help, they had robbed the grave of a recently-buried Tatar princess. He said that the head that had appeared over the edge of the grave was that of another robber, but that he belonged to another gang. The man got so frightened when my brother screamed that he streaked off and cracked his skull on a tombstone, and dropped dead on the spot."

"What about the other two? Were they ever found?" I asked.

"Yes. When they tried to sell the cloth at the market in Sukhumi. At the trial they confessed and said they'd planted the severed finger in my brother's pocket to make it look like he had committed the crime. So my brother was released and he came home on leave."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Did you make up the story about the dead girl, too?"

"Why? Don't you think a dead girl could have gone to see the doctor?"

"I knew it was you." I got up and shouted, "Sylva! Sylva-a!"

Black Zoya walked up behind me and muttered, "Sylva's gone. Sylva's gone!"

I looked all over school but couldn't find her. She must have gone home. Zoya tagged along.

"She didn't even wait for you. A lot she cares about you," she said.

It was all clear to me then. Zoya had dragged me away from Sylva on purpose, though I don't know what for. I got real mad and smacked her. She began to cry, and I went home.

AUGUST 8

After a long interval a new issue of the "X" came out. It has a long ballad which begins:

*We've all learned to speak in a telegraph code,
Our motto is "quicker and shorter",
It's all but impossible to write an ode,
To moonlight or whispering water.
I guess that the best way of writting one now
Is to follow the style of our diction:
"The gartrees were bareviz, the moonnight was clou",
Indeed, truth is stranger than fiction!*

It's great, but who wrote it? Kolya Paltusov and I decided to talk in telegraph code from now on. It's fast and convenient and no one will be able to understand us.

AUGUST 9

I don't like the kind of girls you can call idiots. But if any boy can ever be called an idiot it sure is Yura Gromov. He's told everybody about Maria and me. That blabbermouth! Anybody who babbles like that sure is a damn fool.

The latest of his stupid actions is what he did today. He suddenly came charging into the physics lab (there were no skworks there) and yelled at the top of his voice, "Nikpetozh is in love with Stasya Velepolskaya!"

Everybody crowded around and wanted to know how he'd found out, especially the girls. Yura said that at first Nikpetozh and Stasya had walked up and down in the school yard and then they went behind the stack of firewood and he held her hand and spoke very fervently. Yura said he was hiding on the other side of the stack, eavesdropping.

If he hadn't babbled all about me and Maria I might not have paid any attention to him, but now I see that Yura loves stupid gossip and can't ever be trusted.

Our Pushkin seminar began today. Big Zina told us all about his life and then Volodya Shmerts started acting smart.

"What did Pushkin feel like when his wife was pregnant?" he said.

And Big Zina said, "If you had asked because you were really interested I might have answered you, but since you've only asked it to be nasty, one of us must leave the auditorium, either you, Shmerts, or I."

Then Volodya said that he wasn't trying to be nasty at all and that he'd read the line in Pushkin's letter to his wife in which Pushkin had written: "Since you're pregnant...."

But all the kids started shouting, "Get out, Shmerts! This is an auditorium, not a back alley!"

And so Volodya had to leave in disgrace.

AUGUST 10

While we were playing soccer today Yura Gromov began yapping about Nikpetozh and Stasya again for no good reason. This was downright lousy of him, because not all the boys on the teams go to my school, and I told him to quit it and shut up.

"What'll you do if I don't?"

"I'll push your face in."

"Just you try!"

I didn't try, but I went into a huddle with Kolya Paltusov who's the outside right on the third team and we decided to teach Yura a lesson. This is what happened: when Yura, the inside left, got the ball, Kolya Paltusov ran after him, because he was hogging the ball as usual. Then I raced over, as if to accept the pass, but I actually blocked him. Just then Kolya rushed at him from behind, knocking him over.

"Oww! Ryabtsev did it on purpose! You stinking rat!" he howled.

Everybody knew I hadn't tripped him, so nobody paid attention to that. The captain told Kolya to stop playing a dirty game and that ended it. Yura could barely walk, because his ankle was swelling quickly, and so the boys carried him home on a stretcher.

On the way home Kolya said, "Thwagre."

According to our rules of speaking in telegraph code, you're not supposed to ask for explanations. You're supposed to guess the meaning yourself. I broke my head over "Thwagre" but I couldn't figure it out.

"This wagon's red."

"No."

"That wagtails' refuge?"

"Don't be stupid. Can't you understand? It means: that was great."

I decided to get even with him and kept trying to think of something all the rest of the way. As we were saying good-bye, I said, "Itroth behookopal."

"What kind of a pal?" he said absently.

"No kind of a pal. Itroth behookopal. That's what I'm saying instead of good-bye. Well? What does it mean?"

He thought it over for a while and then blurted: "I'd rather be hooked by an opal."

I burst out laughing. "How can a person be hooked by an opal? What can an opal hook?"

"My aunt has an opal. Wait, don't say anything. Uh, is Behookopal a name?"

"No. It's a telegraph-code word."

I saw he couldn't guess, so I thumbed my nose at him and was about to turn in at my house, but he wouldn't let me go. He kept pestering me to tell him what it was. I didn't want to and held out till it got boring and then I rattled off: "I'm true to the behests of October, Kolya Paltusov. That's what Itroth behookopal means. I don't think thwagre at all!"

And that took care of him.

AUGUST 11

There's a girl in my group we call Dumpling. She's very fat and everybody's forever squeezing her. They get her in a corner and squeeze her and she squeals like a fish. (That's just a figure of speech, because fish can't squeal.)

We got Dumpling in a corner again today and suddenly Yelnikitka came charging up. She shouted and said it was abominable and that she'd bring the matter up at the school council, and the general meeting, and practically go to the head of the government.

So I said, "What do you think we were doing?"

"You know very well! Everything's as clear as day. Don't be a hypocrite."

Then some of the older girls came running and shouting, saying the boys had gotten out of hand completely and were pestering the girls. That was too much. I said that was a bunch of lies and that everybody always squeezed Dumpling and no one ever thought anything about it. I also said I thought Yelnikitka was off her rocker.

Then Yelnikitka got all the girls around her like a hen collects her chicks and said in a solemn voice, "Ryabtsev is displaying himself in all his glory again! I thought he had changed, but this disgraceful impudence is indicative of the way his mind works!"

At this they took Dumpling by the arms and all stamped off, probably to complain.

About ten minutes later Nikpetozh appeared. He herded the boys into the auditorium and gave us another long lecture on sex. Then he pulled out a book and began reading us a story by Turgenev. It's called "First Love" and it's all about a boy who's in love with a grown-up woman. We had a good laugh. Then I said, "Why'd you read that to us, Nikolai Petrovich?"

"In order to show you how a great writer portrays true, exalted love."

So I decided to air the question and said, "What makes you think we don't know anything about it?"

Nikpetozh looked embarrassed. "Some of the teachers feel your views on love and sex are erroneous."

"Do you have any proof?"

"Well, take your attitude towards Lena Orlova (that's Dumpling's real name), for instance. The teachers feel that your attitude towards her has taken an undesirable turn."

"I'm sure Yelena Nikitichna must have said that."

"That's just it. Not only she, but the principal and your math teacher, and singing teacher all feel the same."

"We weren't doing anything. What so special about Dumpling? Everybody squeezes her and it never caused a fuss before."

"The teachers have always noticed everyone's attitude to Lena Orlova, and the situation is aggravated by the fact that she never puts up a fight," Nikpetozh said. "I'm sure that you know, Ryabtsev, that you can only fool around with those girls who don't mind. It has been decided to put an end to it once and for all and, besides, to introduce the study of Marxist ethics."

I caught up with him as he was leaving. "Do you really think we're that much to blame?"

"No, I don't think you're that guilty, Ryabtsev, but I do think you should leave Lena Orlova alone. Yelena Nikitichna says that you're capable of ruining a girl, because, allegedly, you had a real, down-to-earth affair with Gromov's sister this summer."

"How does she know?" I felt I was blushing (it made me feel uneasy).

"Was there anything to it?" He looked at me very keenly.

"What do you mean by anything? I don't think that's anyone's business. How would you feel, Nikolai Petrovich, if people

started gossiping and spreading a stupid rumor, saying you're in love with Stasya Velepolskaya and other things?"

"What? Is that what they're saying?" He gasped, and I got the feeling he was scared.

"See how awful that is? It's all a lot of gossip spread by people poking their noses into other people's business. I don't think that's in the least according to Marxist ethics."

"You're right there." He looked embarrassed. "Gossip is a throwback to the old regime and the terrible past. It's indicative of an absolutely petty approach to things. For instance, I've never concealed the fact from you that I like Sylphida Dubinina, but I like her as a person, and not as a girl. My attitude towards Stasya Velepolskaya is the same. It would be very strange, to say the least, if I decided to have affairs with schoolgirls."

"Sylva has nothing to do with it. No one would ever dare say there was anything more between Sylva and me than a purely comradely relationship. Besides, Sylva and I are completely dedicated to the world revolution, so our personal relationship has been moved to second or third, or even tenth place."

"I can believe that, especially because I respect Dubinina and can't imagine her overstepping the bounds at any time. Still, can you tell me in confidence and as a friend: who is spreading that stupid gossip about Velepolskaya and me?"

"I can't tell you, Nikolai Petrovich, because you'll give that person a hard time in social studies."

"I'd never do that!" He got all red in the face. "I never confuse my social duties and my personal affairs. Actually, what concerned me was whether it was one of the pupils or not."

"It is."

"Well, thank you, Ryabtsev. At any rate, I want you to know that I'll stand up for you in the matter concerning Lena Orlova, since I'm positive it's no more than a storm in a teacup."

"Well, I've got it," I said in parting.

"What?"

"I mean: I'm very glad."

"You've started murdering the language at an early age," he said and sounded annoyed. "As it is, it's being mutilated more than necessary."

"I don't only murder it. I create new words."

"It's not much of a creation," he said and we parted.

There was an outdoor performance of the opera *Carmen* in the park this evening and Sylva and I went to see it. I always used to hate operas, because when people sing instead of speaking it sounds stupid and, besides, it's hard to make out the words. But this time it was different. It all began when the lights went down and the footlights went on. I suddenly felt that the man who waves the little stick at the orchestra was like a magician. Then the opera started. This time I even understood the story, even though it's kind of stupid. But still, it makes you wonder.

The story is about a sergeant who falls in love with a factory girl. The sergeant's name is Don Jose. There was a part I didn't understand. A girl named Micaela comes on and sings for an awfully long time. That's what you always get in an opera: somebody comes onstage all of a sudden and begins singing and waving his arms around. Then Carmen falls in love with him, too, and he's supposed to put her in jail for something or other. He leads her off, but she shoves him away and runs off. Then Carmen does a dance in a tavern (that's something else I couldn't understand. Is she supposed to be a factory girl or just a tramp?). Then a bullfighter comes on and sings a song about bullfighting. I liked it very much, and he was very handsome. You never see a man who looks that good in real life. Then, all of a sudden, Carmen falls in love with him for no good reason (maybe because he's much more handsome than Jose) and promises him something, but I couldn't make out what it was. Then the bullfighter leaves and Jose comes on.

Carmen is just beginning to dance when a fat officer comes on and chases Jose away, because he's sweet on Carmen, too. Jose pulls his sword and is about to run his chief through, but just then some fellows come running on. They have bandanas tied around their heads instead of hats and they rescue the officer. After that Jose becomes an outlaw.

In the third act the smugglers set up an ambush. They want to rob the bullfighter, because he earned a lot of money at a bullfight. Carmen and Jose go along with the smugglers. Then the smugglers hide. They tell Jose to be the lookout and watch for the bullfighter. Then that other girl, Micaela, turns up again, but Jose chases her away.

Sylva says that Micaela's supposed to be his betrothed, but

I don't believe that, because he's in love with Carmen and he joined the smugglers on account of her.

Finally, the bullfighter comes along and Jose blasts him from his rifle, but misses. Then he wants to knife him, but the bullfighter pulls out a knife, too, and they start fighting. They don't know how to fence, so it looked sort of amateurish, but then Carmen and the other smugglers all came running onstage and broke up the fight. I didn't understand why they let the bullfighter go. I guess it's because he didn't have any money. He was probably still on his way to earn some.

Sylva says they weren't going to rob him at all, but that's not the way I understood it, and anyone has the right to understand an opera whichever way he wants to.

Then, in the fourth act, there was supposed to be a bullfight. I don't know how many bulls there were in the fight, but there must have been plenty, because there were about twenty other bullfighters besides the main one and they were all armed with spears and other weapons. At this point everybody waves their hands a lot, because they all want to see the bullfight. When they all leave, Carmen comes running on. She's dying to see it, too, but Jose won't let her go, because he's very jealous of the bullfighter. She won't give in, so Jose stabs her.

"You know, jealousy is a terrible thing," Sylva said on the way home. "I was jealous of you, too."

"My eyes nearly popped out. 'But are you...?' " I said and bit my tongue.

"Am I what? I know what you want to say. But I want to tell you, and I know this from experience, that you don't have to have something else...a deeper feeling, in order to be jealous. You can be jealous even when somebody doesn't know what it's all about. I was jealous of Nikpetozh and even of things. You know what I was most jealous of about you? Your diary. And if you don't want to make me suffer, let me read it."

We walked on in silence for a long time after that. Naturally, I didn't want Sylva to suffer on account of my diary, but, on the other hand, I can't let her read it. It'll be just the same as if I talked to her about all my secrets, the kind of things I'm even afraid to think of to myself.

Suddenly she said, "That means you don't...respect me at all. If you did, it wouldn't have taken you so long to decide."

"Listen, Sylva, a diary is the most secret thing a person has. You're asking me to turn my soul inside-out so you can see it, but there's a lot in my soul that I don't want you to know about."

She stopped and said, "Well, so long."

"But this isn't your house yet."

"If there's nothing between us any more, what's the use of walking together? You go your way and I'll go mine."

"Wait, Sylva! What do you mean? If you want to know, we have an awful lot in common, but I don't think you expect me to strip right here in front of you, do you?"

"If you're going to say such filthy things I won't have anything to do with you!"

I even felt a little hurt. "I'm not saying filthy things. I don't even know why you think it's filthy. And if you think I don't respect you, then listen to this." And I recited the poem I wrote:

*I recall your wise discourse
And our silent bond amidst the noise of school.
No matter that you speak now to another,
I feel complete with you. Without you I am lost.*

"Well, it's not much of a poem. I'd much rather read your diary. Do you think I'm that stupid? Do you think I can't even understand how serious it is? Wait, I know! If I let you read my diary, will you let me read yours?"

"Do you keep a diary?"

"I can tell you," she said, stressing the "you". "Yes, I do."

"And you'll let me read it?"

"Certainly. Because I consider you my friend. Only on one condition, that you let me read yours."

"Can I think it over till tomorrow?"

"Oh, no! You don't put off such things till tomorrow. I thought you were a man, but you're still a child."

It was a hard decision to make. On the other hand, I was dying to read Sylva's diary. So I said, "I want you to give me your word of honor that you'll never breathe a word of it to anybody. Besides, I don't even want you to talk to me about it. Make-believe you never read it."

"My word of honor," she said solemnly. "Just so you'll see it's not because I'm curious, I'll bring you my diary first tomorrow."

AUGUST 13

Since a lot of the kids saw *Carmen* yesterday, we decided to put on an opera at school. I suggested we put on *Carmen*. I said I'd sing the bullfighter's part (I tried it beforehand), and Kolya Paltusov could be Don Jose, because he has a very high soprano and it can pass for a tenor easily.

But the singing teacher said that *Carmen*, or any other adult opera, was out of the question and we would make a mess of it. Then she pulled out a children's opera called *Mushroom Commotion* from her folder and suggested we stage that. She sat down to play the music for us. I've seen a lot of stupid things on the stage, but I never dreamed such junk could be written for the stage, with music to boot. For instance, it all begins with Queen Carrot singing:

*Oh, oh, oh,
Pea-greenrow,
Why is King Pea
Threaten-ing me?
Can I guess?
Yes, yes, yes!*

I don't know what it's supposed to mean, and I don't think anybody else will, either. I sat there listening to it and then sang a song of my own I made up on the spot:

*U-ple me,
Weple you,
Tee-hee-hee,
Boo-hoo-hoo.*

The teacher asked me what it was supposed to mean, and I said I'd appreciate it if she first explained what *Mushroom Commotion* was all about. Especially since the peasants we're sponsoring would probably attend the performance and pelt us with rotten eggs for putting on such an opera, and they'd be absolutely right in doing so. Then she said that, in the first place, in her opinion *Mushroom Commotion* was a comic opera, and if I didn't want to take part in it I could leave. So I walked out. The little kids stayed on. Sylva said she forgot to bring her diary, but will bring it tomorrow.

I just read Sylva's diary and have a feeling she's holding out on me. It's very interesting, no doubt about it, but it's not complete, and I can't tell where things are missing, because she doesn't date her entries like I do.

I've decided not to give her my whole diary, either. I'll just give her the first trimester notebook.

A small notebook of lined paper follows. The title page reads:

SYLPHIDA (YEVDOKIA) DUBININA
FOURTH GROUP

The notebook begins with a poem by Yesenin entitled "I've no regrets", followed by poems by Tyutchev, Balmont and Bunin, and Apukhtin's "The Madman". Then comes the text of the diary.

* * *

I want to and I must experience everything myself.

* * *

Life as presented in literature is one thing, but in reality it's quite different. It's easier to live in your imagination than in reality, but this is something a person has to resist.

* * *

What is our life? A book. Who wrote it? No one knows. We barely make it out: it's joy, it's cares and woes.

It's difficult to believe that Karamzin wrote this back in the 18th century. But he did. He started out by writing epigrams and then went on to write a history.

Z.P. says I write well. I asked her what good that will do me in life, and she said that cultured language is an indication of a cultured person, and that a cultured person's scope is much broader.

* * *

My friendship with Stasya V., as formerly with Lina G., consists of me providing a sympathetic ear for her outpourings. I find it neither pleasant nor unpleasant. I would say I'm indifferent. I don't find Stasya's troubles so terrible or her tears so bitter. Lina was much more justified in feeling all broken up than Stasya is. Still and all, at the most critical moments, when I looked into myself I always saw that

a person thinks of himself first and that life is much more terrible than these temporary worries. I first came to understand that life is a terrible thing long ago. About five years ago, to be exact. Actually, from the time I first became a mature person. And I think that all the boys and girls of my age realize this, and if they don't, then at least they sense it, which is just the same.

Besides, my generation has learned something else. It has learned that no matter how terrible life is, one can and must carry on the struggle and overcome all obstacles. Then it's no longer terrible and can even reveal its brighter side. I know that these thoughts are not my own, but I'm glad that they have reached my mind and taken root there. This gives me strength to go on and to carry on the struggle. I, for one, will never fall so low as to do what Lina and Zoya did. What they did was silly, to begin with, and because of the way it turned out, it became downright stupid. I can't think of anything more shameful than becoming an object of ridicule.

* * *

When I'm all alone I begin feeling very strange. It's as if I rise up from the ground and soar in a vacuum. This is especially true on moonlit nights.

* * *

Who cares about me? Sometimes I think that nobody does. And then I begin to search feverishly for a person who would. That's why I often play the role of a sympathetic ear.

I'm good at writing, because my father is a type-setter. I've always been surrounded by books. I learned to read when I was five. Being determines consciousness.

* * *

I reread everything I wrote and it made me stop and think. Everything depends on my mood. I can cry, but no one will ever see my tears. Or, for instance, I can laugh wildly. I try my best to control my emotions when this happens, because if you let yourself go, you'll lose your self-control.

Stasya Velepolskaya came over yesterday to tell me more about her love-affair. I don't think she should torture him like she does. She'll never go on to college anyway, because she's no good at her studies and there's no use in her going on to the 5th group. What she should do is get married and settle down.

* * *

Mommy and Daddy just had a row. Daddy came home drunk and started an argument. Mommy shouted, "Help, Dunya!" and Daddy shouted, "Go away, Sylphida! Children shouldn't hang around when grown-ups are enjoying themselves!" It was all very disgusting, and if Daddy hadn't left the house, I don't know what I would have done.

* * *

I finished reading *War and Peace*. I would love to be Natasha Rostova, but I know I can't. Natasha had a real, full life, but actually, she's no more than a female. According to *War and Peace*, a woman can never hope for more than being a female. I think that Natasha had her own ideological requirements, too, but Tolstoy concealed them, because he was a landowner and a count. (A representative of the feudal aristocracy.)

I think that Kostya R. is a little bit like Nikolai Rostov, but not as silly. And Zoya Travnikova is like Princess Maria Bolkonskaya, and even prettier. Although, on the other hand, I don't like her kind of prettiness. It's a strange kind. Then again, her hair is always a mess. There are different views on beauty. I, for one, can't understand what a certain person sees in Stasya V. She has a pug nose and one of her side teeth is missing. Besides, she swings her arms like a soldier when she walks. But a certain person is just dazzled by her.

I realize that everything I've written is very petty, but I can't do anything about it.

* * *

You have to punish yourself continuously to overcome such petty thoughts. If I worked at the factory instead of going to school things might have been easier, but I'm not too sure about it, because I know a lot of things about the life of the factory to which our Komsomol group is attached. For instance: a girl who's 16 married a boy she works with and everybody began to gossip. I think that's petty, too. If the law says you can get married at 16, it means you can get married if you want to.

* * *

Though I'd never get married now. (I have a right to, because I was 16 in June.) I've seen a lot of marriages. The

majority of them are unhappy, and I have my own parents' example to begin with. Daddy never used to drink, but now, when they began disagreeing about their convictions, he started to. On the other hand, I have to experience everything. Everything. And I won't be satisfied until I do.

But then again, I realize that a person has to restrain himself and control his emotions. There are two forces struggling within me and I don't know which one will get the upper hand. I even call the force that prods me to experiment Dunya and the one that restrains me Sylphida. Sylphida is the stronger of the two. Dunya is a foolish, ideologically unstable girl.

* * *

Now a word about ideology. It's true that ideology helps you in your daily life, although you don't always know which direction is the right one. Take dancing, for instance. I always thought that dancing was frowned upon, but then I went to the factory club and saw that they were all dancing. I went to see the Komsomol secretary, Ivanov and while I was at it I said, "What about dancing?" And he said, "No one ever prohibited it." And then I asked him why everyone said that dancing was not for progressive young people and, as one of the boys at school put it, it was only sexual friction. And Ivanov said, "That's because everybody's so smart these days. We don't expect anyone to go to a monastery. If you want to have a good time, go ahead and have one, as long as it doesn't harm anyone."

Whatever that means. There are times when it's very difficult to understand ideology correctly, even though your whole future depends on it.

It's easier to understand a book than the things people do in real life. You can read a book over a couple of times and then think over what you've read, but in everyday life you have to take all your decisions on the spot.

Difficult situations usually arise at school, and I always have to act on my own, because I don't have anybody to go to for advice and no time to anyway. This is especially true when there are clashes between the kids and the teachers, or any trouble. When the inspector was here he said that our school was a regular collection of cutthroats. He was wrong, of course. Naturally, there's trouble, but we live in a revolutionary epoch and that means that the upheavals at school are only natural.

* * *

Zinaida Pavlovna is conducting a seminar on Pushkin and it's very interesting. We're discussing *Yevgeny Onegin*. In such matters the first thing you pay attention to is ideology. Of course, *Onegin* is full of feudal-natural-bourgeois-landlord ideology (this is very long, but it can't be expressed in any other way, because this was a natural economy). It's not at all disgraceful on Pushkin's part, because in his time there was no dictatorship of the proletariat and no Soviet system. Tsarism and its representative, Nicholas I, oppressed Pushkin. For instance, he exiled him to Kishinev and then to his estate in the provinces. But there's something I can't understand. Pushkin was of African descent. It's amazing how, having such hot blood in his veins, he could write such a cold and indifferent poem as *Yevgeny Onegin*.

Zinaida Pavlovna says that in Pushkin's day young girls were carried away by Tatyana in the poem. I can't understand this at all. How could she be idolized in such a corrupt, bourgeois-feudal epoch? I don't believe there were women like her then, and Pushkin invented Tatyana, because he was a romanticist.

And I have my doubts about *Onegin*, too, but I can't really judge, because I don't know anything about the psychology of men. I would never want to be Tatyana for anything and I won't, because you have to succumb to your emotions if your love is true and not stifle them. And anyway, Tatyana is not my ideal. There was no spirit of revolutionary struggle in her nature. And one cannot live without revolutionary struggle. On the other hand, though, there's something about Tatyana that I like, because she was always able to control her actions and that means a lot. I only manage to control mine outwardly, but inwardly there's always a struggle going on within me. Naturally, Tatyana had an easier time of it, because she wasn't a dual personality like me, Dunya and Sylphida, and she only did what the natural-economy-landlord morality prompted her to (that's what Nikolai Petrovich said).

* * *

Most of the girls at school want to be movie stars or ballerinas. They hardly pay any attention to their studies. They just study enough to pass the tests, and don't care whether they remember anything afterwards or not. Which

means that most of the girls are as ignorant as Stasya V. I was talking to one of the 5th group girls and she said, "When I graduate I'll become a movie star and go to America. That's my plan for the future." The minority of girls want to work at the factory after school in order to join the working class.

* * *

Zoya Travnikova is after me. No matter where I go in school she tags along. What does she want?

* * *

End of Notebook

AUGUST 16

I attended a Komsomol meeting at the factory. They said that our social activities were not up to the mark at school. And that the pupils were to blame, and not the skworks, as we believe. Seryozha Blinov said that we couldn't do anything about it, because the skworks were in charge of everything, and even such a sphere as self-government was "an invalid on skwork crutches." The reply was that we had only ourselves to blame again, because we're not active enough and there are many other ways in which we could be socially active. Seryozha said we had wall newspapers and hobby clubs. Then he was told that the Young Pioneer work was on a very low level and that our Young Pioneers (all of them are from the junior groups) do nothing but march around in the gym to music and play. Then again, there's social work to be done besides working with the Young Pioneers. Seryozha wanted to object, but he was told that it was very easy to find an excuse for doing nothing, but that it was more difficult to justify himself in actual deeds. In a word, they raked us over the coals for our work and we'll have to improve.

AUGUST 17

I told Sylva she gave me an incomplete diary and she didn't say no, which means it's the truth. I told her I'd keep it for a little while longer, because I didn't really get to the

heart of it. Then I gave her the three notebooks that make up my diary for the first trimester. I read them over beforehand and saw there was nothing there that I wouldn't want her to read. I want to see what she'll say after she's read them.

AUGUST 18

The business about our squeezing Dumpling is taking an unpleasant turn. I've discovered that several skwork meetings were devoted to this question (Nikpetozh told me in secret), and Big Zina demanded a school trial of everyone who took part in it (which means most of the boys). But Yelnikitka said that if not for me the other boys would never have done it, and if they're to try anyone, it's only me. Dumpling really looks dumpy and red in the face, because the skworks called her in a couple of times and Sylva says she's very proud to be the center of the uproar. I asked Nikpetozh what would happen and he said he didn't expect anything serious, but that I would probably be publicly reprimanded. Besides, he said he's going to defend me, and he advised me to choose one of my friends to defend me as well.

I thought it over and told Sylva I didn't know whom to choose and she said would I have anything against her being my defender.

"How will you defend me?"

"You'll see. It's no concern of yours. All you have to do is agree."

I agreed.

AUGUST 19

I was tripped up and now I have a limp, but I still go to school every day. Yura Gromov tripped me, and it was dirty playing, because we were both on the same team and he had no right to rush me. As soon as my leg gets better I'll get even with him. He'll be sorry, because I have soccer boots.

AUGUST 20

There was a terrible row at school today. I want to write it all down as it happened so that I'll be able to see my way clear.

It happened in the auditorium during the Pushkin seminar. Big Zina had told us to write a composition on *Yevgeny Onegin*. We handed in our assignments three days ago (both the 4th and the 5th groups attend the seminar).

Today, when we were all in the auditorium, Big Zina burst in, sat down at her desk with a mysterious look on her face, placed our notebooks and papers on her desk and stared at us in silence. We all looked at her. About three minutes passed. I cleared my throat. Volodya Shmerts snorted. At last she said,

"If Pushkin were alive today he would probably die a second time after reading just a fraction of the impossible nonsense you produced. Words fail me. To use one of your favorite expressions: I don't know what the devil it is! No. I believe I'm mistaken. It's even worse than that."

At first, there was an uneasy silence, but when she said that we burst out laughing. She continued,

"However, I can't bunch everyone together. There are some acceptable compositions, although, like any exception, they only serve to prove the rule. Here, for example, is a fine example of the nonsense I just spoke of." She opened a notebook and began to read,

"Pushkin was a Marxist and a novelist. That's why he wrote a long novel called *Yevgeny Onegin*. He tried to depict the struggle of the classes that was going on at the time. Still, Pushkin was a bourgeois and that's why he didn't write anything about the proletariat, and all he wrote about was the bourgeoisie. Then he got married and wrote a fairy-tale for the primary grades called *The Story of Tsar Saltan*. Then he was killed in a duel and was buried, but *Yevgeny Onegin* is still of interest today.'"

By then we were roaring, but Zinaida Pavlovna stared at us unsmilingly. Finally, she said,

"Whom are you laughing at? You're laughing at yourselves! And, by the way, this is a quotation from Gogol, whose works you have probably read as attentively as Pushkin's."

"Are they all like that, Zinaida Pavlovna?" Sylva asked.

"I said there were exceptions, but this doesn't change the general impression. Here's another composition. It gives a detailed account of the plot and deserves to be read from beginning to end." She picked up a sheet of paper and began to read,

"Yevgeny was the son of an impoverished nobleman. He went to his place and saw his uncle lying on the table. He began liking country life, but then lost his liking and was inamored. Tatyana was a landowner's daughter. She read novels, beat her chambermaids and wore a corset. She became inamored of Onegin and told her nurse to write him a letter. The nurse sent her grandson off to the neighbor with the letter. Tatyana was very inamored of Onegin and he was always under her pillow, and they went to see the poor and suffered. But then the poet Lensky stood up for Tatyana. Lensky was a thorn in Yevgeny's side and they fought every day. One day Onegin shot him dead out of his revolver. After that Tatyana married a general friend and was very rich and feasted every day and was noticed at Court. Her husband was a cripple. Yevgeny saw Tatyana again and was very inamored. He helped her on with her coat and took it off. Yevgeny went to see her and expressed his feelings, but she expressed hers and said she was married to general and would always be faithful to him. At this Yevgeny ended his story."

"Stasya Velepolskaya wrote that! I saw her writing it!" Yura Gromov shouted.

The moment he did, everyone stopped laughing. Stasya Velepolskaya jumped up, stamped her foot and got all red in the face. She wanted to say something, but the tears ran down her cheeks and she dashed out of the auditorium. However, this was not the last of it.

"See what your lack of tact has done, Gromov?" Big Zina said. "Who asked you to shout like that? You won't improve her spelling this way or make her approach her studies more seriously. What you can do, though, is make her drop out altogether."

I was surprised at what followed.

All of a sudden Sylva jumped up and said, "I don't agree. I think such things should always be discussed publicly. What's the use of having our school altogether if no one pays any attention to such things?"

The girls started shushing her, but she continued, "The girls don't like what I'm saying, and I know why they don't, but I'm going to say it anyway. If some people are more interested in the theater they can go there. There are a lot of others who'd like to attend secondary school and can't, because there are no vacancies. Let them have a chance."

Then most of the other girls began shouting, but there

was so much noise I couldn't make out what they were saying. Some of them were glaring at Sylva and shoving her, so that I even shook my fist at one of them on the sly, but they kept it up. Then Big Zina's fist came crashing down on her desk.

She stamped her foot and shouted, "Stop it! This is a school!" She was all red from excitement. I've noticed that she likes these kinds of rows, even though she pretends she's mad.

When the noise finally died down Big Zina proposed that we elect a chairman and debate the question of whether Yura Gromov was right in disclosing the fact that Stasya Velepolskaya had written the composition or not.

"But since it's a personal matter, I would suggest that the question be discussed in broader terms, namely: can we stand for such illiteracy as has come to light in your compositions in the 5th group of secondary school?" Big Zina said.

Seryozha Blinov had been silent until then. He said, "We've come here to study and not to hold debates."

"I'm surprised at you, Blinov. You're always such a great supporter of debating and here you are now, speaking out against a debate. However, if the majority agree with you, I'll take back my suggestion and tell you about Pushkin and his works again, although, if you care to remember, we spent two months studying this subject last year. Then we'll take the matter of Velepolskaya to the school council and discuss it at a general meeting."

"Oh, no," Sylva said. "Blinov's words are no command for us. I, for one, say that we should discuss the matter immediately and even draw up a resolution, listing the measures that should be taken."

It was put to a vote. Half of the kids voted for having a debate and half voted against it.

Then Seryozha Blinov got up and said, "I'm leaving. The tricks that were used here were something usually pulled by the teachers. Just before the vote Zinaida Pavlovna threatened us with the school council and a general meeting. Naturally, her proposal was backed up by a certain number of votes and the debate, despite the inner resistance of the meeting, will still be held. Such threats are known as pressure. And I don't want to take part in a debate that's called under pressure."

"That's all very logical, Blinov," Big Zina said, "but you must agree that things like Velepolskaya's composition and Gromov's impermissible remark should be acted upon both

by the pupils and the teachers. What would you suggest we do? I suggest a measure which will prove useful in the future, and which seems sensible and acceptable to a lot of pupils present here. You say you've come here to study and not to debate. You say that if the matter is taken to the school council and the general meeting it will mean bringing pressure to bear on you. One might think that you'd prefer to hush the matter up and don't want it to be resolved for some reason or other."

"He can leave and good riddance!" I shouted. "Arguing back and forth like this won't solve anything. It's boring and won't be of any help. Let's either have a debate or a lesson. Whichever way, as long as we end this hogwash."

"He's right!" the kids shouted. "Let's have one or the other." Some of the girls followed Blinov out, but the majority remained and decided to hold the debate. I was elected chairman. Big Zina went over and sat down at one of the desks and I went and sat at her desk. Yura Gromov was the first speaker.

"I don't see anything wrong in what I did. So what if I said it was Stasya's? The way I see it, she shouldn't write like that."

"Don't shout if you haven't been called on. You're out of order. Sit down, Gromov. You'll be called on," I said.

Yura tried to say that I wasn't chairing the meeting properly, and that I didn't have any right to pick on him, but the kids started shouting at him to shut up and he sat down. Then Sylva took the floor.

"I see that some of the girls are opposed to what I said, but I had to say what I did. I only wish them well. In a couple of months from now the 5th group will go on to college, which means entering real life. And what will they take along to college? The compositions Zinaida Pavlovna just read to us can't even be called poor. They're downright illiterate. The worst of it is that Velepolskaya never even bothered to consult any of the teachers or any of the pupils who know more on the subject than she does. She just sat down and rattled it off, hoping she'd get a passing mark. I have a concrete proposal. I believe that we of the 5th group should have a good look at ourselves before we take the college entrance exams, and make sure that all traces of illiteracy have been liquidated."

Then Volodya Shmerts got up. The moment he did I felt he was going to pull something off.

"Zinaida Pavlovna says that Pushkin would have died a second time if he'd read our compositions. The way I see it, that would be no great loss, because he came from a bourgeois background and we, as it says in the song, are 'the young guard of workers and peasants'."

"You're not keeping to the question on the agenda, Comrade Shmerts," I said. "Please try to keep to the matter up for discussion instead of going off into the woods. If you can't, I'll have to ask you to sit down."

"All right. Anyway, I say that Gromov had a right to name Velepolskaya, because if she's in the 5th group and spends a lot of time talking to the teachers, and even to a certain teacher when nobody else is around, it still doesn't make her educated."

"You are denied the floor," I said. "We won't stand for you spreading gossip here, Volodya."

He laughed unpleasantly and sat down. And I said to him,

"If you can't behave, I'll have to ask you to leave the meeting."

"How come you're so polite, Ryabtsev?" he said. "I'll bet you want to get yourself elected to the school council."

That made me mad. "I'll have to ask you to leave the room for contempt of meeting, Shmerts."

"I'm not a dope to leave the meeting for no good reason."

"What do you mean? Get out!"

"All right, I'll go. If you want to know, a dope is something from Pushkin's letters. I suggest you read them, Ryabtsev. It'll do a lot towards liquidating your illiteracy."

He left. I think he did it all on purpose, just to show everybody that I haven't read Pushkin's letters.

Then one of the older girls took the floor and said that Sylva was wrong. Besides, she said that the skworks were to blame for the pupils being illiterate, and not the pupils (I agree with that to some extent) and that anyone who was illiterate should never have been promoted from one group to another to begin with. She spoke rather calmly and the debate would probably have ended without any incident but then the following took place.

Nikpetozh came hurrying into the auditorium. He looked around, saw Big Zina at one of the desks, sat down beside her and began whispering excitedly. Big Zina shook her head and then replied just as heatedly. The kids stopped talking and stared at them.

Then Nikpetozh raised his voice and said, "Is it correct

from a pedagogical point of view to publicly belittle a grown girl and drive her to tears and hysterics?"

Big Zina replied calmly and loud enough for everyone to hear, "I don't think this is the time or the place to discuss this, Nikolai Petrovich. I suggest we discuss it later in the teachers' room."

"I can't agree," Nikpetozh said and was about to continue.

However, I mustered up my courage and said, "Even though I respect you very much, Nikolai Petrovich, I didn't give you the floor. If you want to carry on a personal conversation, would you please do it out in the hall? We're having a debate here."

"Oh, I didn't know that. Excuse me." He rose and left the auditorium and Big Zina followed him out. The moment the door closed behind them everyone jumped up, and no matter how hard I banged my fist on the desk I couldn't restore order. The girls went into a huddle in a corner and began whispering.

Sylva came over to me and said, "I think we're all going straight in to a petty-bourgeois slant at top speed. How can we stop it?"

"What do you mean by a petty-bourgeois slant?"

"Well, do you call this a debate? Besides, I caught myself thinking an awful thought. You know, when Nikpetozh came in I was practically certain he would."

"So was I."

"See? That's what I mean by a petty-bourgeois slant. Let's get out of here."

There was a heated argument going on in the skworks' room. All the skworks were there, but Nikpetozh's voice was the loudest. Some of the little kids said that Stasya Velepolskaya had had hysterics and had gone home.

The kids were all strangely silent. I decided it would be best to go to the soccer field, and that's exactly what I did.

AUGUST 24

There's a growing rumor about a rift between the skworks and Nikpetozh and him saying he would resign. All the other skworks seem to be backing up Big Zina, so that Nikpetozh is a minority of one. A lot of the boys and nearly all of the girls are on his side.

Everything has gotten awfully muddled. For instance, I don't know what to do or whose side to be on. Sylva's for Big Zina all the way, because she says that no matter what Nikpetozh feels about Stasya, he should have been just and openly admitted that she had no right to slap together such a composition and that she never should have been promoted to the 5th group.

I agree, but on the other hand: in the first place, I like Nikpetozh very much and, secondly, I always side with the minority as a matter of principle. In this case, even though most of the boys are on his side, the other skworks are in the majority and against him, and they'll certainly win, because the skworks always win when they're in the majority.

So, as far as I'm concerned, the question boils down to the following: I have to choose between Sylva and Nikpetozh. Sylva says that if I take his side it means I'm a person with no principles.

This isn't something that can be solved offhand. I have to think it over. That's why I decided to abstain from joining either party until I come to some definite conclusion.

AUGUST 26

Since the new school year is just around the corner, Sylva and I went to see Ivanov, who's the Secretary of the factory Komsomol group. We went to find out when we're going to be full-fledged Komsomol members and not just candidate members. Ivanov said that he could put the question on the agenda of the next meeting and we'd probably both be elected, but that wasn't enough. He said that he believed we could both be activists if we wanted to, because we have all the necessary qualities. I was very flattered. Then he went on to say that it wasn't a question of being a Komsomol member for show, but of actually being one. And that meant raising the standard of Komsomol work in school. I said that that was something Seryozha Blinov, our former Komsomol Secretary, had to do.

And Ivanov said, "I don't agree. In the first place, that Blinov of yours is a hothead. Secondly, if all the other Komsomol members sit around waiting for the Secretary to do all the work he'll pass out from exhaustion no matter how strong he is. That's not rational at all. Especially since the state is giving you an opportunity to join the ranks of cultured people. You've got to live up to this trust now and prove that you're truly in the vanguard.

That means you have to put all your effort into the work ahead and not shove it off onto the Secretary."

"There's something I wanted to ask you, Comrade Ivanov," Sylva said. "You spoke about cultured people and about the state giving us a chance to join their ranks. This is what I want to know. The best girls in my school want to get jobs at the factory after they graduate. Maybe they shouldn't wait until they graduate, though?"

"Why do they want to work in the factory? What'll they do there?" Ivanov said.

"Work, naturally. What they want to do is join the working class."

"What?"

"Join the working class. Become proletarians!"

"It won't be easy. Besides, everyone has to start as an apprentice."

"Those difficulties can be overcome."

"Of course they can. And perhaps it would even do your young ladies some good to work by the sweat of their brows," he said thoughtfully. "But the question is: will this be rational? What I mean is, will it be a rational use of human energy? After all, the state has spent an awful lot of the people's money on you. And it's been spent so that the knowledge you've gained will be put to good use. And now, what if you toss all that learning aside when you've only gotten half-way to your goal and start learning to be mill workers from scratch? That means that it'll take more time and energy to teach you how to be factory hands, but the State doesn't have any to spare. Besides, we have a lot of unemployed, and often these are skilled people. So, instead of giving these unemployed jobs, we'll have to waste time, money and energy teaching you skills, crossing off everything that's been spent on you up till now. No, comrades! This is no way to do things. We need doctors, teachers, engineers and technicians. Where will we get them? From among the graduates of secondary schools. That's why you have to complete your education. You'll just have to put your plans for coming to the factory aside for a while."

"Does that mean the factory doors are closed to us?" Sylva sounded very disappointed.

"No. If you really persist you can get a factory job, and if you're not hired at our factory you can try another. But you must ask yourself a harsh question: is this rational? Because you're politically conscious people and not dimwits. And since you are, and have a good idea of the difficulties facing the Soviet state,

you shouldn't increase them but should do your best to liquidate them."

Then I asked him what he thought about our work in school and if he had any suggestions about improving it.

"No work is being done there at all," he said, and I felt very offended. "At any rate, we can't see any results. If you want to do something worthwhile, stop talking and get down to work."

I asked him what Sylva and I could do, for instance.

"Are the Young Pioneers of your school organized?"

"What do you mean? They take the Young Pioneer Oath, they march around, they wear red ties, they take part in demonstrations, they..."

"That's what I mean," Ivanov interrupted. "They wear red ties. Young Pioneer posts are being organized in all the schools now. They're made up of those pupils who don't have any other social duties. The posts must help a school to participate in the social and political life of the country and in establishing self-government. They must help the teachers, even in various educational matters, besides being in charge of the political, anti-religious and physical education of their schoolmates. This is only some of the work to be done. Why don't you organize a Young Pioneer post in your school?"

After that we left.

AUGUST 27

I was put on trial publicly in school in connection with Dumping.

It was all very solemn. Seryozha Blinov was elected to preside. In the beginning he said he wouldn't for anything, but he finally consented rather wearily. There were two prosecutors: Almakfish and Nina Fradkina. And there were two defense counsels: Nikpetozh and Sylva.

There was a separate bench for me and one for Dumping. They chose a jury of six boys and six girls. When I saw Volodya Shmerts, Yura Gromov and some of their friends chosen as jurymen I decided I was in for trouble. Seryozha Blinov began the proceedings.

He said, "We'll now hear the case of Yelena Orlova vs. Kostya Ryabtsev, who is being accused of organizing an unpermissible action against the plaintiff. Kostya Ryabtsev, do you plead guilty?"

"Why should I? I admit I fooled around, but don't see anything criminal about that. Everybody squeezed her."

"Who's everybody?"

"All the boys."

"Was it your idea? Did you start it?"

"No."

"Who's idea was it then?"

"Nobody's. We just squeezed her. It was a game."

"But every game has a leader. For instance, there's a captain on a soccer team."

"Soccer is an organized game, but this wasn't organized."

"All right. That's enough for now. Lena Orlova, do you consider yourself the offended party?"

She didn't say anything.

"Well, Orlova? Everyone's waiting." Seryozha sounded very official.

"He squeezed me," she squeaked.

Everybody burst out laughing.

Seryozha rang his bell and said, "Order in the courtroom, or I'll have to clear the courtroom! And so, Orlova, do you consider yourself to be the offended party?"

"No, she doesn't!" Kolya Paltusov shouted from where he sat. "She just admitted that he squeezed her."

"One more word from you, Paltusov, and you'll leave the courtroom. Well, Orlova? Did you enjoy being squeezed?"

"No."

"Then why didn't you go to the skw... school worker on duty and complain?"

"I was scared."

"What of?"

"Uh.... They'd hit me."

Everybody laughed again.

Seryozha said, "Don't be silly. When did you ever see the boys here hitting the girls?"

"They always do!"

"May I ask a question?" Big Zina said. "Can you tell me, Lena, why none of the teachers are ever told about these fights and why none of us know about them?"

"It's only a game," Dumpling said. "And sometimes the girls hit the boys."

"That will be all for now, Orlova," Seryozha Blinov said. "Now for the witnesses. The court will only call one witness, citizen Kaurova who was the skw... school worker on duty that day. What have you to say about it, Yelena Nikitichna?"

"I want to say that Ryabtsev is an immoral boy and was thus undoubtedly the leader of the gang that attacked Orlova. The thing he and Orlova call a game is not a game at all but an abomination. Such a thing cannot be tolerated in school. If someone else and not Ryabtsev were mixed up in it we might believe that this was all innocent mischief, but we have other information about Ryabtsev."

"Well, we're not going to discuss other information now," Seryozha said. "Does anybody else want to testify?"

"I do," Kolya Paltusov said.

"What can you say? Come on, hurry up."

And then Sylva said, "I protest. The chairman shouldn't hurry a witness."

"All right. But there's no use dragging this out. What did you want to say, Paltusov?"

"Well, I squeezed her, too, and I don't see why everybody's accusing Ryabtsev and nobody else. We were just horsing around like we always do, and if you want to try anyone, you'll have to try the whole school, and maybe a couple of times a day at that. Why don't the skworks think back to when they were kids and remember whether they fooled around or not?"

"You have to call them school workers, Paltusov," Seryozha said.

"All right, school workers. But that doesn't change anything. You can find things like that in lots of books. The only difference is that the teachers had much more power in the old schools, and they could whip kids for fooling around, and now they can't. So they thought up this new idea of having a trial."

"No one thought it up," Seryozha interrupted sternly. "A trial is an organized form of Soviet social practice. That's enough. The prosecutors now have the floor. Alexander Maximovich."

All of a sudden Almakfish said, "I refuse to speak, because the case is clear as it is."

Everyone looked at him in surprise.

Then the second prosecutor, Nina Fradkina, got up and said, "I demand that the strictest sentence be passed on Kostya Ryabtsev. For instance, he should be expelled, because he has loose hands and he can't pass a girl without slapping her on the back."

"Don't forget you pulled my hair last week," I said.

"You'll have your say as the defendant, Ryabtsev, but not now," Seryozha said.

"I only pulled it once, but look at how many times you slapped me. Then he's forever starting those squeezing sessions. The boys say they like to hear her squeal. If they suddenly decide they'd like to hear me holler or smack their faces with my shoe they'll start squeezing me, too. That's why I demand that Ryabtsev be punished as a lesson to everybody else. And if he's not expelled, then at least he should be made to solve a hundred problems in math as his week's homework."

"You don't punish anyone by giving them extra homework," Seryozha said. "Now let's hear the defense. Do you want to speak first, Dubinina?"

"If you want me to," Sylva said and jumped up. I looked at her and did not recognize her. Her eyes were blazing and her hair was curly and dishevelled.

"If you expel Ryabtsev you'll have to expel all the other boys, too. Then only the girls will remain, because Nina Fradkina, who has just accused Ryabtsev, and everybody else, too, knows very well that he's not the only one to blame. All the boys are to blame. Any time you look into the gym or the halls you'll see a bunch of kids fooling around, and you can never tell who's hitting who. But if this is what we decide, we'll be going against the ideology of the Soviet system which introduced coeducational schools in order to free women and establish the equality of the sexes. Maybe Ryabtsev is more to blame than the other boys, but that doesn't mean we should go against the order of things established by the revolution and separate boys and girls. Why doesn't anyone pester me? Because I don't want them to, and I'll never stand for it. The same goes for the other girls. Instead of sentencing Ryabtsev, I suggest all the girls who like to fool around and then propose that others be expelled be sentenced themselves."

"Now let's hear what Nikolai Petrovich has to say," Seryozha said.

"There's nothing much left for me to say after what Dubinina has said, although I can add something. There's good and evil in every person, and they are always at odds. People first imagined this as the conflict between God and Satan, darkness and light, etc. This has also found its reflection in literature. For instance, there's a drama by Shakespeare entitled *King Henry IV*. It's about Prince Hal becoming friendly with a drunkard and rake called Falstaff, and helping him to rob travellers. He leads a rowdy life, etc. But then Prince Hal becomes king. Falstaff hurries to him, thinking that now at last the new king will reward him and will resume his bawdy life, but that's where Falstaff is mis-

taken. Hal can barely recall who he is and when he does, it is as some terrible nightmare.

"What this means is that in each person there is something of Prince Hal and something of Falstaff. Sometimes, especially in one's youth, Falstaff gets the upper hand, but as soon as a person begins to feel his responsibility to others, then Hal gets the upper hand and his Falstaffian life is remembered as a terrible nightmare.

"Now you want to censure Ryabtsev for actions which, and I agree with Dubinina here, are not all that terrible. It's really nothing more than the ordinary kind of schoolboy tomfoolery. But let's assume that this is the Falstaffian period of his life. It will soon vanish. If we now censure him, we'll cause him to rebel and continue this sort of behavior. Actually, there's more of Prince Hal in his makeup. What I mean is, there's more good than evil in him."

That's when Almakfish jumped up and shouted: "I want to say something! As the prosecutor, I object to what the defense just said. Nikolai Petrovich just spoke about good and evil and said that there is more good in Ryabtsev than evil. I insist and state that from a *qualitative point of view Ryabtsev's action stands apart from good and evil, while from a quantitative point of view it's a sign of the abundance of the epoch*. That is all I have to say."

No one understood what he meant. (Nikpetozh loves Shakespeare and tries to cite him wherever possible.)

"You have the last word as the accused," Seryozha Blinov said to me.

"I'm not going to try and justify myself. I'm not guilty and everybody knows it, which means that if I try to defend myself I'll be defending this frame-up. But there's something I want to say. Nikolai Petrovich and then Alexander Maximovich spoke about good and evil. From what we learned in political science, there is no such thing as good and evil. Everything depends on economic relations, and good and evil are an idealistic invention. I, for one, think that there is no good and evil in me. When I've had a good meal I feel good towards others, but when I'm hungry I feel mean, and if anybody pesters me I can clout him one. That's all."

The jury filed out and stayed out for exactly five minutes. My heart pounded when they left the room. What if they decided that I should be expelled?

Then Volodya Shmerts read the verdict:

"Ryabtsev is to be reprimanded for his behavior and is to stop

his squeezing, and Orlova and the other girls are also to be reprimanded and are not to allow themselves to be pawed and squeezed in the future."

Everything turned out as Sylva said it should.

AUGUST 28

A new issue of the wall newspaper came out today. It was not dated and not signed. The heading was:

"We're for Nikpetozh !!!"

Since I still can't decide which party to join, I didn't take part in putting out the paper and, in fact, don't even know who did. Sylva doesn't, either.

Here's one of the articles:

Medicine.

The Fight Against Itchy Tongue

Prof. I.M. Dopey has discovered a new cure for itchy tongue which, of late, has threatened to become a major epidemic. The greatly respected luminary in the world of medicine who, by the way, has just received the Nobel Prize (amounting to two dill pickles) has devoted the lesser half of his life to combatting the above-mentioned disease.

Prof. Dopey has discovered the itchy tongue bacillus, which is spread by the bite of the Stupidimus under favorable conditions of well-developed idleness.

The venerable medic has bravely and voluntarily contracted the disease and, as a result, has been babbling at a rate of 1,000 words a minute, of which 120% is made up of the most abominable, gossip-spreading nonsense. However, due to the professor's exceptional perseverance, he has been able to find a cure.

Prof. Dopey has registered the medicine, extracted from Kautsky and other reactionary authors who wrote on Marxian ethics, under the trade name of antigossipine.

It is to be taken after school and upon retiring.

Prof. Dopey has also drawn up a recommended list of treatment for the dread disease. To achieve the best results (lowering the gossip count to 25 per minute), the patient must discuss the following subjects without a stop:

1) A comparison between the Moscow Fire of 1812 and the burning of the skworks' rules in our school.

2) The similarities and dissimilarities of: a speedboat, a dinner coat, an iron nail and a Mass for the dead.

3) The question of lighting cigarettes on shiny bald pates (to be proven mathematically).

During the interview Prof. Dopey said that he first took note of the spread of the itchy tongue bacillus on a world-wide scale when Lord Curzon's notes extended beyond the limits of the *Sunday Times*. When the epidemic reached the USSR the professor came to Russia to conduct a thorough study. It was here that he stumbled upon our school. Prof. Dopey will begin his examination of itchy tongue victims in our school this week.

Several tanks of turpentine have been set aside for painting itchy tongues.

This is all good and fine, and I agree with it completely, but each day my inner struggle becomes more and more unbearable. I don't know whether I should be on Nikpetozh's side or not. There's rumor to the effect that he's going to resign outright. School will be a dead place without him.

I told Sylva about my doubts. She says she feels just as bad, but that it's the principle of the thing that counts. Besides, she says that it's a known fact that individuals are of no importance to history. I know that myself.

AUGUST 29

I finally decided to go to Nikpetozh.

"When the personal and the social clash, which should you choose?" I asked.

"The social."

"Oh. Then ... that's why I can't join the party that's for you. Even though it's going to be very hard to do, I'll have to join the party that's opposed to you."

"There's no need for any parties," he said and I had a feeling it was difficult for him to speak. "I know that I'm ... wrong. I'm resigning. That's because for a while I put my personal interests above my social duties."

There was a lump in my throat. The conversation was over.

AUGUST 30

Sylva and I are Komsomol members now. We've been given an assignment and are going to organize a Young Pioneer vanguard post in school. This is our first Komsomol assignment.

Today it's official: N.P. Ozhegov is resigning. I'll still go to see him at his home, though.

SEPTEMBER 1

I'm on the school council, representing the Young Pioneer vanguard post. The Pioneers all cheered for me. I don't know why, but the little kids like me.

Three cheers for our vanguard post!

The End

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KASSIL L.

The Black Book and Schwambrania

This autobiographical story by Lev Kassil, a favourite children's writer, tells of pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russia, of a real school, and of an imaginary state invented by two brothers, the knights of "heavenly Schwambrania".

Schwambrania is a beautiful and harmonious land where "funerals are rare and there are films every day. The weather is always sunny and cool. All the poor are rich. All are contented". But the school the little boys attend is a kingdom of regimented tedium, meanness and injustice where the life of each pupil with his misdeeds is written into the punishment register or Black Book.

The reader meets a colourful crowd of people. The wind of change and revolution bursts into their lives and brings it closer to the world about which the story's two leading characters dream.

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VASSILEVSKY B.

Where Is the North?

Boris Vassilevsky is a young writer. After graduating at Moscow University, he went to teach at a school on the Chukotka Peninsula in the Far North.

The life of the hunters, meetings with geologists, the life of schoolchildren on Chukotka and the individuality of the national culture are all reflected in this book of stories written with restrained simplicity and with humour.

